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THE PASSION OF MAHATMA GANDHI

A Play by

G. K. AMBADY

With a Foreword by

K. M. PANIKKAR



HOE & CO MADRAS INDIA

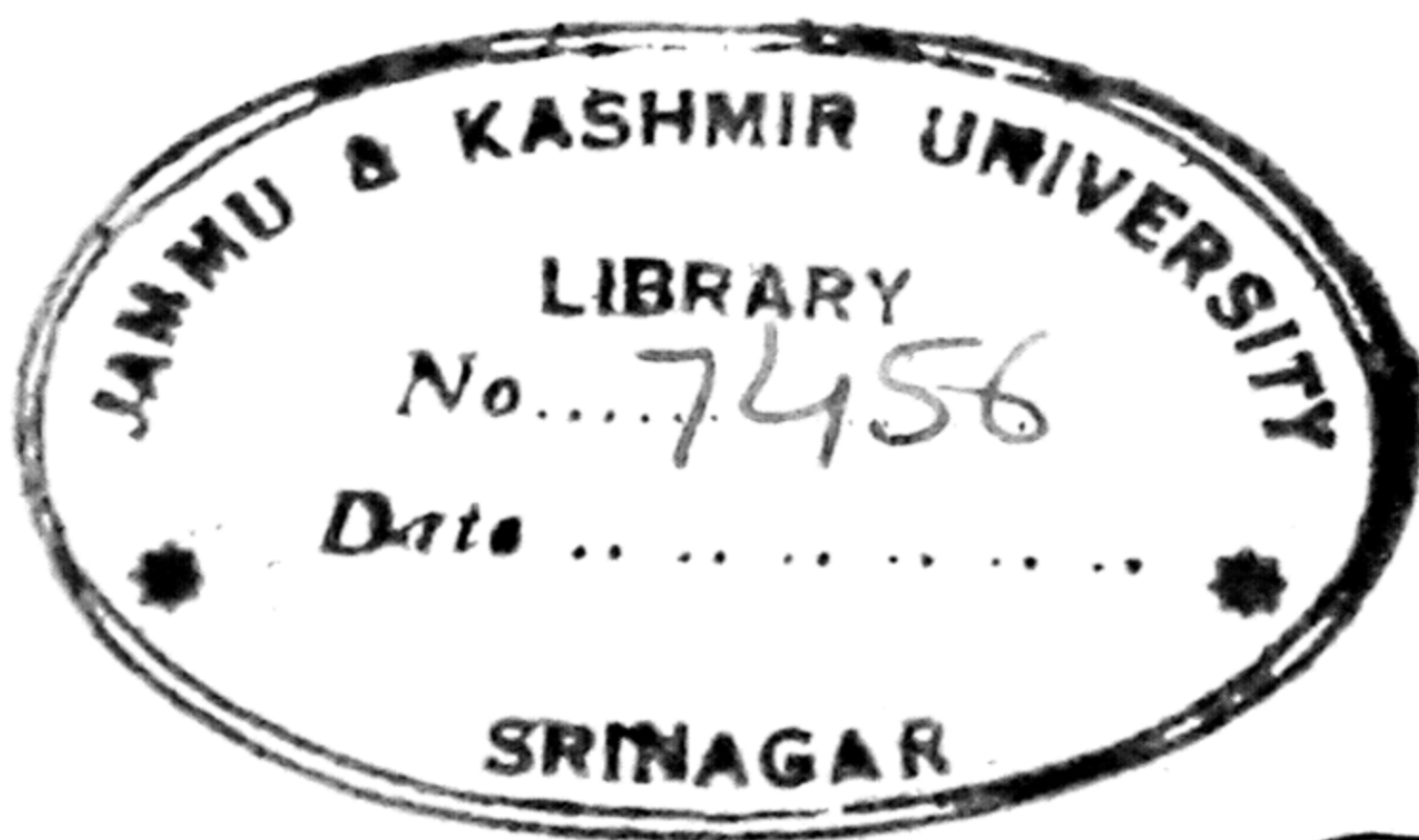
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*TO THE COMMON PEOPLE
WHO KEPT FAITH WITH GANDHIJI
SERVED HIM IN HIS WAY
SUFFERING IN SILENCE
FOR NO RECOMPENSE*



FOREWORD

It is difficult to imagine a theme so suited for dramatic presentation as the life of Mahatma Gandhi. From the moment he set foot in South Africa to the tragic climax of his martyrdom in Birla House, Gandhiji's life may well be described as an immense drama of unequalled intensity. Whatever he touched, whether it be the condition of Indians in South Africa, the situation of the lowly labourers in Champaran, the innocuous looking manufacture of salt from the sea, or the position of minorities in Free India, he sublimated it to a moral issue and made it a problem of conscience not only for himself but for millions. The very fact of his pitting himself against the might of the British Empire in India and carrying on without wavering and without hesitation a struggle for 25 years is itself a feat of epic grandeur with all the elements of high drama in it.

When, however, it comes to a dramatic treatment of his life, the difficulties that the theme presents would seem to be overwhelming. Almost every incident in Mahatma Gandhi's life could be presented as a drama. How then is his whole life, so full of great events to be brought within the range of a single work? It requires unusual talent and practised dramatic ability to select the

incidents and present them in a manner which brings out the essential unity of Gandhiji's life and thought. A series of disjointed scenes, each dramatic in itself, will not convey either the greatness of the Mahatma, or his development as a moral force in the world, or even the unique character of his struggle with the power of Britain in India. Mr. G. K. Ambady has in my opinion successfully overcome these difficulties. He has selected the incidents with care and has woven them into a single piece, in such a manner as to emphasise the unity of Gandhiji's life and the growth of his moral personality. It is no small achievement to have done this.

Mr. Ambady's work is panoramic in its conception. It covers full half a century and the incidents described take place in South Africa, Sabarmati, Delhi and other places. In most incidents, the scenes are charged with deep emotion and have a quality of concentration which saves the play from being too much of a narrative. Nor has the author departed from history in essential matters. It is a performance of undoubted merit, which deserves a high place, not only in the growing literature of Gandhism, but in modern Indian literature in English.

CAIRO

K. M. PANIKKAR

14th April, 1953

PREFACE

The idea of this play first came to me in 1945. I had been reading Gandhiji's "Autobiography" as an antidote for the frustration then weighing on me. Later, I took up his "Satyagraha in South Africa" as well as various books written about him. With these vivid impressions, it seemed an easy matter to write a play depicting his life. As soon as I sat down to sketch the very first scene, however, I found the task bristling with problems.

The canvas was altogether too vast. It covered a span of half a century. The scene embraced two continents. The number of incidents and characters was well nigh bewildering. I was overawed by the stature of my hero and my own inadequacy. Nevertheless I persisted and it became a labour of love. In spite of its many defects, I hope that the play presents a clear picture of the greatest personality India has produced.

Admittedly, the play has gaps in chronology as well as in the events and the personalities in Gandhiji's life. These are inherent in the process of selection, simplification and telescoping of events. Minor invention had also to be resorted to for the sake of continuity of theme and dramatic

purpose. The liberties I have taken, it is hoped, do no injury either to the psychological integrity of the *dramatis personae* or to the historical perspective. The major deviations are enumerated in the Notes appended to the play.

For the material of my play, I have relied chiefly on Gandhiji's "Autobiography," his "Satyagraha in South Africa" and Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya's "History of the Indian National Congress." I am also indebted to numerous publications dealing with Gandhiji's life, radio broadcasts, newspaper reports and other current literature on the subject. I may be forgiven if, owing to lack of a reliable record which I failed to keep, I do not individually acknowledge all these sources, but I offer my thanks in silence to the authors concerned. I take this opportunity, however, to thank the Trustees of "The Navajivan Trust" for their permission to make use of Gandhiji's writings and speeches.

Finally, I acknowledge my debt of gratitude for the assistance and encouragement given to me by Miss Agatha Harrison.

MADRAS
January, 1953

G. K. AMBADY

ACT I

SCENE 1

[*The Wardroom on S.S. "COURLAND" on the afternoon of the 13th January, 1897, in Durban Harbour. The Captain and Dadibarjor, the ship's Doctor, are taking coffee. The Captain is going through some papers. The Doctor is reading a newspaper.*]

After a few seconds, a steward enters with a letter which he offers to the Captain. The Captain takes it, grunts, and lays it on the table. He goes on with his work.]

STEWARD: Beg pardon, Sir, the messenger says it's urgent.

CAPTAIN: Confound it! Am damned if I can make head or tail of these accounts. (*Brightening up and turning to the Doctor.*) I know what I shall do, Dadi. You shall be my auditor as well as the ship's medicine man. You Parsees are born accountants.

DOCTOR (*Gaily*): Aye, aye, Sir. (*As an afterthought.*) But I fear that would never do. The owners would never agree to have their accounts doctored, would they? (*They laugh.*)

CAPTAIN (*Opens letter and reads. He shrugs his shoulders and puts letter in his pocket. Then turns to the steward*): Is Mr. Gandhi still on board?

STEWARD: Yes, Sir. He and his family are the only ones left. All packed up and ready to leave, but a gentleman is with him. From the newspapers, I think.

CAPTAIN: Go and ask Mr. Gandhi to see me before he goes ashore. Tell him it's important. Go at once.
(Returns to his papers.)

STEWARD: Very good, Sir. (Salutes and leaves.)

DOCTOR (Looking up from his newspaper): Ha, we are in the news, Captain. (Reading) "Durban 12th January"—That's yesterday of course—"Government have decided to lift the quarantine on S.S. "Courland" and "Naderi" and allow the Indians to disembark. This is contrary to the unanimous sentiments of the white population of Natal. Great excitement prevailed at a public meeting held today to protest against Government's decision. The majority of those present were for taking the law into their own hands and preventing by main force the Indians from landing."

CAPTAIN: Just blowing off steam. You heard what the steward said. All passengers for Natal have already left the ship.

DOCTOR: But listen. (Reads on.) "Mr. Escombe, Attorney-General, eventually dissuaded them from this course of violence."

CAPTAIN: There you are.

DOCTOR: The sting is in the tail. (Reading with emphasis.) "He promised that the Government of Natal would obtain from the Legislative Council the requisite powers to restrict future immigration."
(Lays down the paper.) Iniquitous!

CAPTAIN: Now, what's up?

DOCTOR: Don't you see? First, without any rhyme or reason we are placed in quarantine. Then the

quarantine is dragged on hoping we would return to India. When that fails, they bully Seth Abdulla and offer him money to sail his ships back with the passengers. Finally the threat that if any one attempts to land, he will be pushed into the sea. And now Mr. Escombe promises to legalise racial discrimination.

CAPTAIN: Oh, come off it, Dadi. Hasn't the quarantine been lifted? Have not the passengers disembarked? Has even as much as the hair of a single Indian been touched?

DOCTOR: Fortunately, no, but . . .

CAPTAIN (*Interrupting*): Mind you, even if there had been a little hot-headedness I wouldn't attach any significance to it. Feelings had run high. You can't expect the whites to relish being swamped by a flood of foreigners. It is only reasonable that they would be a bit upset when, all at once, they find two ship-loads of Indians in the harbour. What is more, they think that Gandhi has deliberately brought them to Natal.

DOCTOR: You know that isn't true. Many of the passengers are not new-comers. About half of them are bound for the Transvaal and will not be staying in Natal. Gandhi has nothing to do with their coming. He is here in Durban to resume his practice as a Barrister.

CAPTAIN: I remember, he came on board at the very last moment.

DOCTOR: He was not expecting to sail so soon. But he received a telegram from the Natal Indian Congress urging him to hurry back. I think it has something

to do with the new legislation against Indians. As it is, they have no place in Natal except as coolies. They have no rights as citizens. An inferior race!

CAPTAIN (*Persuasively*): Nobody denies that inequalities exist. They exist everywhere. Don't they exist in India, your own country? Who invented the untouchables and the pariahs? And you must not forget that Natal is a young colony. To a young nation, the creation of a State of one common race is the supreme ideal. But that is only a temporary phase. Political liberty and equality must come in time. England will see to that, if need be.

DOCTOR (*Getting up*): Britain will certainly demand that the Britons in Transvaal should have equal rights with the Boers. If need be, a naval squadron will sail to Delgoa Bay to fight for the Englishman's birthright. Political equality will come for the whites. But, for the Indians, no. The Indian has no rights. And yet the Natal Government itself brought him here. Has he not done his part? Then why has he no claim to citizenship? Why is he to be denied the elementary rights of every immigrant?

CAPTAIN (*Good-humouredly*): You fire these questions at me as if I am the Natal Government. Well, Dadi, let us leave the Englishmen in the Transvaal to Joe Chamberlain and the Indians in Natal to Gandhi. It is their job. Chamberlain has the British Navy and Gandhi is armed with (*Tapping his pipe*) non-violence.

DOCTOR: Who knows? Gandhi may break a new way. In Gandhi's hands, non-violence may prove to be a potent weapon. He isn't just a dreamer. You

remember the night of the storm? How he put courage into the frightened passengers and had all of us on our knees in prayer!

CAPTAIN: Wait and see. Gandhi's non-violence may be put to the test sooner than we imagine. But I do hope, it will not be, today.

DOCTOR: I hope so, too. There has been enough trouble already on this voyage. (*Getting up and moving to the door.*) I shall see you later. (*Turning at the door.*) If it would set your mind at ease, Captain, I shall see Gandhi safely in bed and bring you word! He is staying tonight with my friend, Parsee Rustomji. Good-bye, Captain. (*Goes out.*)

(*After a second, the steward enters with a visiting card.*)

STEWARD: The newspaper gentleman wishes to see you, Sir.

CAPTAIN: Ask him to wait. I must see Mr. Gandhi first.

(*The steward removes the coffee cups and moves to the door when there is a knock. He opens the door and announces "Mr. Gandhi, Sir" and goes out.*)

Come in, Mr. Gandhi, and sit down.

(*Gandhi enters the room. He is 28 years of age. He is surprisingly youthful. He is dressed neatly in European clothes, except for his turban.*)

So, you have managed to get rid of the reporter?

GANDHI: Really, I am very glad that he came. I know now what has been exasperating the Europeans. In India I had spoken very strongly against the labour

system and the poll-tax on Indians in Natal. Reuter cabled a summary to London. You know how easily these things get distorted. Not intentionally, of course. Actually I had described the South African situation less forcibly in India than I had done previously in Natal itself. Certainly less forcibly than the facts warranted. I have a verbatim report of what I said in India in support of this, which I have shown to the reporter.

CAPTAIN: What did he say?

GANDHI: He has promised to publish the full facts in tomorrow's issue of the *Natal Times*. Thank God, there have been no untoward incidents. Our prayers have been answered. All the passengers from the "Courland" and "Naderi" have safely disembarked.

CAPTAIN: Except yourself.

GANDHI: Yes, except my humble self, wife and children. We are also ready to go ashore.

CAPTAIN: It is about that I wanted to see you. You are, you know, in a different category from the rest of the passengers.

GANDHI (*Smiling*): You mean that I am the villain of the piece? I hadn't thought of that. I see that the Europeans might think so. But once the facts are placed before them they will agree that I am free from blame.

CAPTAIN: But that won't be till tomorrow. (*Pauses as if there is something on his mind.*) We must not forget that feelings have been running high. If you land now, you might be seen by some of the hot-heads. Suppose they carry out their threats against you?

What will you do? Will you stand by your principle of non-violence? If they smite you on the right cheek, will you turn to them the other also?

GANDHI (*Quietly*): I must. I hope God will give me courage to face them and forgive them whatever they do to me. I know that the white population sincerely believe that what they are doing is right. How then can I be angry with them?

CAPTAIN: You mean you would allow them to break your bones and do nothing about it. I think, Mr. Gandhi, that is carrying your doctrine too far. (*Gandhi shakes his head.*) We should however avoid the contingency. (*Pulls out letter.*) As a matter of fact, I have received a message from Escombe, the Attorney-General. That is why I wanted to see you. He says that the Europeans are still in a dangerous mood. To be quite plain, in their present temper, your life is in danger. Escombe suggests that you and your family should postpone landing till after dusk. He is arranging for Tatum, the Superintendent of the Harbour Police, to be here to escort you home. Escombe sends the message as a friend.

GANDHI: I am grateful to Mr. Escombe (*Thoughtfully.*) I can have no objection to following his advice.

CAPTAIN: That is settled then. It is a great relief to me.

GANDHI (*Getting up*): Thank you, Captain. It has been a memorable voyage, hasn't it? Good-bye and God bless you. (*Shakes hands and goes out.*)

CAPTAIN: (*Takes the visiting card and rings the bell. The steward enters.*)

Ask the gentleman from the *Natal Times* to come in.
(*Steward salutes and leaves. A European Reporter comes in.*)

Sit down. What can I do for you?

REPORTER: Thank you, Captain. Sorry to be a nuisance. But there is something I would like to know a little more about. I am told that there was a sort of miracle on the high seas.

CAPTAIN: Miracle? Who has been telling you?

REPORTER: I got it ashore from one of the passengers.

CAPTAIN: What did he tell you?

REPORTER: Something like this. (*Melodramatically.*)
There was a terrific gale. The ship rocked and rolled. All seemed lost. Panic all round, bar Gandhi. Gandhi leads a prayer. Lo and behold! The storm dies down and all is calm.

CAPTAIN: The fact is that most of us are prepared to meet a miracle half way.

REPORTER: What I thought. Oriental hyperbole. A bit of wind and a rough sea, may be a thunderstorm, and the scene is set for a miracle. Gandhi as the new Messiah calming the storm. A touch of Caesar as well, perhaps. "Nay, be not afraid, for you carry Caesar and his fortunes"! (*Laughs disparagingly.*)

CAPTAIN: Now look here, young fellow, you have got it all wrong. Gandhi is no Caesar, but it could be the nearest thing to a miracle that most of those passengers have ever seen. The gale was certainly

one of the worst in my experience. The passengers were a heterogeneous lot, Hindus, Christians, Mussalmans. They hadn't learnt to face life together, much less a common danger. Gandhi went amongst them. He seemed to cast a spell. They forgot their differences. They regained their courage. Gandhi said: "Let us pray. God's will be done". Every one joined in. Then the storm died down. Was it an answer to the prayer? Who knows? The passengers were united after that. Quarantine, threats, nothing could shake them.

REPORTER: I get the idea. (*Laughing.*) They tell me that you also fell under the spell.

CAPTAIN: In a way, yes. It was a solemn scene. One couldn't help being drawn into it. I was on my knees too with the rest. I hadn't prayed for a long time. I no longer knew how to pray. Then in a flash the few words of prayer my mother taught me as a child came back to me. God bless her soul! (*Pause.*) That was a miracle, if you like.

REPORTER: This Gandhi has got something about him.

CAPTAIN: He certainly can inspire men with confidence, in themselves and in him. Intensely religious. Religion has a big pull in India, you know.

REPORTER: You are right there, Captain. The Indian mutiny, what touched it off, hey? Religion. One of these days Gandhi may cast his spell over the dumb millions in India and set them against the British. Gosh! I can see it coming.

CAPTAIN: Not a hope. A long way off yet, anyway. In fifty years it may amount to something.

REPORTER: Fifty years? Fifty years from the year of Grace 1897. I shall mark it on my calendar. But I doubt if I would make it. A merry life and a brief one for me. (*Laughs and gets up.*) Well, thank you, Captain.

(There is a knock at the door and Mr. F. A. Laughton, K.C., comes in. He is a powerfully built man. The reporter greets Mr. Laughton at the door and goes out.)

LAUGHTON: Good afternoon, Captain. My name is Laughton.

CAPTAIN: How do you do, Mr. Laughton. I have of course heard of you. You are the legal adviser of Abdulla & Company, my owners, are you not? (*Laughton nods his head.*) Do sit down.

LAUGHTON (*Sitting down*): Thanks. Perhaps I should come to the point at once. I understand Gandhi hasn't gone ashore yet. If you have no objection, I should like to take him with me.

CAPTAIN: I see. There is something that you ought to know. Mr. Escombe has sent word that it would be a grave risk for Gandhi to land just now. Gandhi has agreed to wait till dusk.

LAUGHTON: As the legal adviser of the owners I tell you that you are not bound to take notice of Escombe's message. As far as you are concerned, that ought to satisfy you, Captain. The decision therefore rests with Gandhi.

CAPTAIN: I have no wish to interfere. You would naturally like to see Gandhi. If you will please

excuse my leaving you, I shall send him to you straightaway.

LAUGHTON: Thank you. (*The Captain goes out. After a few moments Gandhi comes in—he is dressed as before, but without the turban—they greet each other as old friends and sit down.*) Why haven't you disembarked, Gandhi? I understand that you are not going ashore till after sundown.

GANDHI: Yes. There is a message from Mr. Escombe.

LAUGHTON: So the Captain told me. To be quite plain, I do not like the idea of your waiting here and then entering the city like a thief. Forgive my bluntness. If you are not afraid, you can accompany me and we shall walk to the town as if nothing has happened. Mrs. Gandhi and the children can take a carriage and we shall follow on foot.

GANDHI (*Quietly*): I do not think I am afraid. It is only a question of propriety, whether I should accept Mr. Escombe's suggestion. We should also consider whether the Captain of the Steamer is responsible in the matter.

LAUGHTON (*Smiling*): What has Escombe done for you that you must needs heed his suggestion? What reason have you to believe that he is actuated by kindness and not by some ulterior motive?

GANDHI (*in protest*): Please, please. It is a friendly act, and very kind of Mr. Escombe. I am sure of it.

LAUGHTON: I know more than you what has happened in the town and what hand Escombe had in the happenings here. (*Gandhi shakes his head.*) All

right. Let us assume that he is actuated by the best of motives, but if you comply with his suggestion, you will stand humiliated. I would advise you to go with me straightaway. The Captain is our man. His responsibility is our responsibility. He is accountable only to Abdulla & Company. From the great courage they have displayed in the present struggle, I know what they will think of the matter. Let us inform the Captain and start.

GANDHI (*Making his decision*): Very well, let us go. I have no preparations to make. (*Smiling.*) All I have to do is to put on my turban!

(*They go out.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

[The same afternoon. The sitting room on the first floor in Parsee Rustomji's house in Durban. The room has two doors, one from the staircase and the other leading to the inner rooms.]

As the curtain rises, Rustomji is peering out into the street.

Mrs. Kasturbai Gandhi and Mrs. Rustomji enter from the inner rooms. They are both dressed in Parsee style.]

RUSTOMJI (*Turning round*): There is no sign of Gandhibhai yet. (*Jocularly.*) You shouldn't have allowed him to give you the slip, Mrs. Gandhi.

KASTURBAI: He said he would be following us on foot with Mr. Laughton.

RUSTOMJI: He is coming on foot? Oh! That explains it. He has so many friends that he is bound to be stopped by at least a dozen on his way here.

MRS. RUSTOMJI: I am glad Mr. Laughton is with him. Indians are not popular just now in Durban.

RUSTOMJI: My wife is right. We were not even sure if you would be allowed to land at all. The Europeans were in such a temper. Thank God they have come to their senses at last.

MRS. RUSTOMJI (*To Kasturbai*): You must stay with us till you get used to this place. There is no hurry for you to move into your own house.

KASTURBAI (*Smiling*): My husband will decide.

RUSTOMJI: Mrs. Gandhi, do you mean that he does not let you decide for him, or does he?

KASTURBAI: Me decide for him! Haré Ram. But let me ask you, what does a man know of housekeeping and bringing up children, even if he has been to England?

MRS. RUSTOMJI: Mr. Gandhi has made a study of everything.

KASTURBAI (*Laughing*): That is the trouble. He meddles with everything. What is the result? A white elephant at our door. He tells me how I am to dress. Shoes for the children. Cutlery and crockery. Oatmeal porridge and cocoa in the morning. No tea and coffee, they are poison. But our friends prefer the poison, so, I have to keep tea and coffee also. Look at the expense!

MRS. RUSTOMJI: But what is to be done? To help one's people one must be influential. To have influence, one must move with the times.

KASTURBAI: He does not like us to be known as Kathiawad banias.

RUSTOMJI: But the Gandhis of Kathiawad are not known as banias. They are farmers. They were never engaged in trade of any sort. It is not a question of caste, but of occupation. Now, if you like, I am a bania!

KASTURBAI (*Proudly*): My husband's father, his grandfather and his uncle were the Dewans of Porbandar. My husband was to follow in their footsteps.

RUSTOMJI: It is just as well for us that he didn't. There is an amusing story about it. It seems he didn't do too well at School and College. Advice was sought from a Brahmin. The Brahmin said "Send the boy to England. The English send the fool of the family to India. Let Indians send the fool of the family to England." (*Laughs.*)

MRS. RUSTOMJI: Nobody is less like a bania than Mr. Gandhi. And he would be the last person to think any the worse of a man on account of his caste.

RUSTOMJI: I know what Gandhibhai means. His dislike of banias has nothing to do with caste. But he doesn't like the ways of merchants. It is something he read in a book by an Englishman called Ruskin.

MRS. RUSTOMJI: Indeed! What has this Ruskin got against merchants?

RUSTOMJI: We had an argument about it once. The soldier is ready to die in battle. The physician would not leave his post in an epidemic. The priest will not teach falsehood. The lawyer will not tolerate injustice. But what about the merchant? It seems that we merchants are concerned only with exploiting the public. (*Laughs.*)

KASTURBAI: That is all very well. All I know is that on the ship I spent most of my time searching for the shoes the children had thrown away. Their poor feet were so cramped. But what is the use? We are only women and we must obey our husbands.

MRS. RUSTOMJI: Never mind, Mrs. Gandhi. Times are changing. Doesn't Queen Victoria rule the British Empire?

KASTURBAI : But my husband rules in our house.

(Steps are heard on the stairs. Rustomji moves to the door to meet Dr. Dadibarjor who comes in with parcels. Rustomji embraces the doctor and relieves him of the parcels.)

RUSTOMJI : Dadi, where is Gandhibhai?

DOCTOR : Isn't he here yet?

KASTURBAI (*Anxiously*) : He is very late.

(She gets up and moves towards the street window, when again steps are heard on the stairs. All look towards the staircase door.)

KASTURBAI (*Rushing towards the door*) : It is my husband. Are you hurt? What have they done to you? Haré Ram.

(Gandhi appears at the door in a dishevelled state. There are blood stains on his face and clothes. Kasturbai helps him to a seat and he almost faints for a minute. She and the doctor support him from either side.)

MRS. RUSTOMJI : Shall we take him to the bedroom?

GANDHI : Thank you. I felt faint for a minute, but I am all right now.

DOCTOR : Mrs. Rustomji, could you please get me some bandages and a little hot water?

(Mrs. Rustomji goes out. Rustomji lights the lamp and bolts the staircase door. The doctor examines the wounds.)

Fortunately, the wounds are not serious. Mostly bruises, but they must be painful.

(Mrs. Rustomji enters with a bowl of water and bandages. Kasturbai cleans the wounds and the doctor dresses them.)

DOCTOR: So the whites have carried out their threats, after all. Thank God your life is safe.

GANDHI *(Smiling)*: It is nothing at all. I am getting used to being assaulted. *(Earnestly.)* One whom God wishes to save cannot fall even if he will.

RUSTOMJI: Wasn't Mr. Laughton with you?

GANDHI: Yes. We had hardly left the wharf when some lads saw us. My turban must have identified me. They began to shout "Here's Gandhi, here's Gandhi, surround him, thrash him." Mr. Laughton thought we should get into a rickshaw. No rickshaw boy would come near us. So, I was spared the shame of a rickshaw ride.

RUSTOMJI: The rickshaw boys must have been afraid of a beating from the Europeans.

GANDHI: Yes. The crowd had swollen by the time we reached West Street. Some one caught hold of Mr. Laughton and tore him away from me. Then began a shower of stones and abuses. They knocked off my turban. Somebody slapped me in the face and kicked me. I was almost unconscious and I held on to the railings of a house.

MRS. RUSTOMJI: How cowardly of the Europeans.

GANDHI: We should have no bitterness towards them. One should suck the very venom of a cobra from the wound of one's enemy.

DOCTOR : One thing is clear. The Europeans did not mean to let you get away alive. It is an accident that you have come through safe.

GANDHI (*Shaking his head*) : It is God's will. Anything could have happened. The mob was a blind beast after its prey. Not a moment too soon help came. Strangely enough it was a European lady who saved me, Mrs. Alexander.

MRS. RUSTOMJI : Mrs. Alexander? The wife of the Superintendent of Police?

GANDHI : Yes. She knows me. Fortunately she was coming up the street. She saw my plight and hurried to my side. She is very brave. Shielding me with her sunshade, she walked beside me. In a short while we met a police escort. (*Listening to noises from the street.*) Sethji, what is that?

RUSTOMJI (*Looking into the street*) : There is a crowd outside. Mostly Europeans.

(*There is a knock at the door. Rustomji hesitates to open the door. He notices a piece of paper which has been slipped under the door, which he picks up and reads.*)

Apparently there are some hooligans in the crowd.

GANDHI : What do they want?

RUSTOMJI : They are asking me to hand you over to them. (*Contemptuously.*) Bah !

DOCTOR : And if you don't?

RUSTOMJI : They threaten to burn my house down.

(*Gandhi sits with bowed head as if praying. Against the silence in the room, shouting can be*

heard in the street "We want Gandhi". Again there is a knock. Rustomji picks up yet another note slipped under the door.)

RUSTOMJI: Gandhibhai, this is addressed to you.

GANDHI (*Without raising his head*): Please read it.

RUSTOMJI (*Reading*): It is from Mr. Alexander. "If you wish to save your friends and their property as well as your own family, I advise you to put on the dress of an Indian constable, come out through Rustomji's godown, steal through the crowd with my man and come to the Police station. A carriage is waiting for you at the corner of the street. This is the only way I can save you and the others. The crowd is out of control. If you do not act promptly many lives may be lost."

(Rustomji opens the door. The messenger dressed as a hawker enters. Rustomji bolts the door.)

MESSENGER (*Saluting*): I am a policeman. I have brought the disguise. We must be quick.

GANDHI: Alexander is right. (*Getting up, Kasturbai helping him.*) I must remove myself from here. We must not provoke violence. Ba, don't worry, I shall be quite safe. (*Turning to the messenger.*) Come, I am ready.

(Gandhi, with Kasturbai, Rustomji and messenger, goes out.)

DOCTOR (*To Mrs. Rustomji*): The Europeans are running true to form! Aren't they?

(The shouting outside is louder and continues for a few seconds. The Doctor and Mrs. Rustomji

*listen grimly. Suddenly there is a lull.
Rustomji comes in.)*

RUSTOMJI : Gandhibhai has left.

MRS. RUSTOMJI : Where is Mrs. Gandhi?

RUSTOMJI : She is with the children. Poor lady, what a home coming !

MRS. RUSTOMJI : She may want me. (*Goes out.*)

(There are noises of jeering and laughing from the street.)

DOCTOR : What can that be?

RUSTOMJI (*Looking into the street*) : Some one is talking to the crowd. I think it is Alexander. (*Looking again.*) Looks as if he is moving to our stairs.

(They listen to the steps on the stairs. There is a knock. A voice shouts "Rustomji, open the door, I am Alexander." Rustomji opens the door and Alexander comes in. The door is again bolted.)

ALEXANDER : Is Gandhi gone?

RUSTOMJI : Yes. He left with your man a minute ago.

ALEXANDER (*Relieved*) : Thank God ! (*Triumphantly.*)
Now I can handle them. (*Goes to the street window and shouts to the crowd.*) What do you want?

VOICE IN CHORUS : We want Gandhi.

ALEXANDER : What will you do with him?

VOICE IN CHORUS : We will burn him.

ALEXANDER : What has he done?

VOICES : Vilified us. He is flooding Natal with coolies, etc.

ALEXANDER : What if he does *not* come out?

VOICE IN CHORUS : We will burn the house down.

ALEXANDER : His wife and children and others are here. Will you burn women and children?

A VOICE : You hand over Gandhi, and no one will be hurt.

ALEXANDER : You insist on having Gandhi? (*Singing.*)
Hang old Gandhi.

On the sour apple tree.

(*The crowd laugh and take up the song lustily.*)

(*Shouting.*) Listen please! Gandhi is not here. He has escaped under your very nose. You had better go home now.

(*The crowd laugh derisively, shouting "It's a lie, It's a lie".*)

ALEXANDER : If you don't believe me, one of you can search the house. You got excited today and didn't obey the police. We therefore played a trick on you. We have removed your prey. You have lost the game. Don't blame the police for this. We have simply done our duty. If you don't find Gandhi, will you go home in peace?

A VOICE : All right, but if we find him, we will hang him.

(*Alexander comes away from the window beaming.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE 3

[A few days later. A room in Gandhi's house in Durban, furnished as an office. There is one door for visitors and another leading to the living quarters. Gandhi is talking to a client. His wounds are not completely healed yet.]

Although the passage of time since the last scene is only a few days, Gandhi looks more mature and sure of himself.]

GANDHI (*Looking at the papers in his hand*): It is as I thought. Here is your original statement. It is on the strength of this that I took up your case. (*Drops the papers on the table.*) I warned you then not to expect me to take up a false case. On cross-examination you completely broke down in the witness-box. I have been deceived.

CLIENT: It is nothing to what my opponent is doing. He has tutored all his witnesses. We still have a good chance of winning the case. If we win, I shall gladly pay you double fees.

GANDHI (*Angrily*): You can't tempt me! I have no wish to win unless your case is just. And my fees are not conditional. Whether the case is won or lost, I accept nothing more or less than my fees.

CLIENT: What is to be done now?

GANDHI: I shall ask the Magistrate to dismiss the case without any further argument. There is nothing else I can do. I am sorry. (*Looks at his watch.*) I am expecting Mr. Escombe, the Attorney-General. (*A bell rings.*) That must be him. Will you please ask him to come in?

(The client goes out. Gandhi walks to the door, when Escombe comes in.)

How do you do, Mr. Escombe? You are punctual to the minute. Won't you sit down?

ESCOMBE *(Observing Gandhi's wounds)*: I am extremely sorry for what has happened. It is a great relief that your injuries are not serious.

GANDHI: Thank you. My wounds are almost healed. I want to forget the whole incident.

ESCOMBE: But surely we cannot let it go so lightly. I may as well tell you that the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Chamberlain, has cabled that your assailants should be prosecuted. We are of the same view. The offenders must be brought to book. Can you identify your assailants?

GANDHI: One or two of them, perhaps. But I do not wish that they should be prosecuted.

ESCOMBE: May I ask why?

GANDHI: It is very simple. I do not hold my assailants responsible for what they did. If what their leaders had said about me was true, they had every reason to get excited. They know the truth now and I am sure they are sorry.

ESCOMBE: Perhaps you would like to think it over, or you may like to consult your friends?

GANDHI: That is not necessary. My mind is made up.

ESCOMBE: Well, Mr. Gandhi, I was not prepared to hear that you don't want prosecution. But there is no doubt that you have come to the right decision. It will help your community. Incidentally, it will save us a lot of embarrassment. Could you send me

a note please signifying your decision? I shall cable Mr. Chamberlain a summary of your note.

GANDHI : Why, you can have the note here and now.

(The curtain drops as Gandhi starts writing the note. When the curtain again rises, Escombe has left and Gandhi is walking from the door with Ahmed Muhammad Kachhalia, an Indian settler from the Transvaal.)

GANDHI : Well, Kachhalia Seth. You have your business in Johannesburg?

KACHHALIA : Yes, I have settled down in the Transvaal.

GANDHI : Tell me, are you not better off in the Transvaal than we are here?

KACHHALIA : Hardly. The Europeans are squeezing us out from trade. All sorts of troubles. To start with there is a registration fee of £25 if we wish to trade. A lot of money, specially for the new-comers.

GANDHI : Didn't you make any protest?

KACHHALIA : We did. President Kruger was most insulting. "You are the descendants of Ishmail" he said, "You are born to serve the descendants of Esau. You must be content with what we give you."

GANDHI : Did he say that?

KACHHALIA : His very words. Why, there we have Kruger's policy in a nutshell. We can't buy property except in the worst quarter of the town, where there is no sanitation, water supply or lighting. No name is black enough for us. We are supposed to prey on women and spread loathsome diseases. We are just outcastes.

GANDHI : What a shame? But we must face facts. What about our Panchamas and pariahs in India? Most of our people here are illiterate and worse. We must be fair to the Boers. I am told that they do not consider even Englishmen as their equals.

KACHHALIA : That is so, but chiefly for political rights. As the law stands all powers of Government are vested in 20,000 families of Boers for all time. There are thousands of English settlers but they are treated as aliens. England will hardly tolerate this. Especially, as she is out for supremacy in South Africa. Trouble is already brewing.

GANDHI : You mean?

KACHHALIA : War is certain. And then we shall be caught between the British and the Boers.

GANDHI : What will you do?

KACHHALIA : The Boers will be fighting for their very existence. Naturally our sympathy should be with them.

GANDHI : I don't think it is a question of personal opinion. We are British subjects. We have asserted our rights as such. So long as we owe allegiance to Britain, we must support her. They may ill-treat us here, but it would be unbecoming to look on with folded hands when ruin stares them in the face.

KACHHALIA : If the Boers win, they will wreak frightful vengeance on us.

GANDHI : A Boer victory is quite possible. But if we waver on that account, we shall be forfeiting our manhood.

KACHHALIA : I see your point. We must cast our lot with the British. That seems to be our only salvation.

GANDHI : Our fate is largely in our own hands. We must learn the lesson of service instead of self-interest. We can redeem ourselves only by great sacrifice.

KACHHALIA : We are prepared for any sacrifice. We are even prepared to go to the gallows to protect our self-respect.

GANDHI : If you are prepared for jail when the time comes, that will do for me.

KACHHALIA (*Desiring to take leave*) : Gandhibhai, I shall take your message to the Transvaal. God be with you. (*Extends his hands.*)

GANDHI (*Taking Kachhalia's hands in his*) : Till we meet again.

(*Kachhalia goes out. Gandhi walks to the other door and shouts "Ba, where are you?" He comes back to the table. Rustomji enters with Kasturbai.*)

RUSTOMJI : Are you free at last? You look tired. (*Coming closer.*) What have you got on your coat? What is this white powder?

KASTURBAI : It is starch. (*Laughing.*) He has been washing his collar himself.

GANDHI : My first experiment in washing. I have used too much starch and not pressed sufficiently. I was afraid of burning the collar.

(*Rustomji laughs.*)

Anyway, it doesn't trouble me and I am glad I am providing some amusement for you.

(*Kasturbai proceeds to light the lamp.*)

RUSTOMJI: But, surely, there is no lack of laundries here?

GANDHI: What about the bill? For the charge of washing a collar I can buy a new one. Now I am no longer dependent on the washerman. I prefer by far to wash my things myself.

(Rustomji, in fun, examines Gandhi more closely.)

RUSTOMJI: Hey, what is wrong with your hair, Gandhi? Rats have been at it?

GANDHI: The white barber won't cut my hair. So I had to cut it myself.

(Rustomji and Kasturbai laugh.)

Is it really as bad as all that? *(Turning to Kasturbai)*
Ba, can you make us some hot cocoa?

RUSTOMJI: No cocoa for me please. Your advice I am prepared to swallow, but not your cocoa.

(Kasturbai goes out laughing.)

GANDHI: You look worried. Anything the matter?

RUSTOMJI *(Throwing off the mask of fun and breaking down.)* Bhai, I have been caught smuggling. They will send me to jail. I shall be ruined. I have kept nothing back from you. But I thought I ought not to bother you with the tricks of my trade. So I never told you about this smuggling. How I wish I had! Now I am doomed. No one but you can save me.

GANDHI: That is in God's hands. You know what to expect from me. You must make a clean breast of it.

RUSTOMJI *(Humiliated)*: I have confessed to you. Isn't that enough.

GANDHI *(Gently)*: You have wronged not me, but the Government.

RUSTOMJI: I will do whatever you tell me. The case will be tried by a jury. A Natal jury will never acquit an Indian.

GANDHI: Let me think. We should avoid the case going to court. The Customs Officer has discretion in such matters. He will of course be guided by the Attorney-General. I shall meet them both. You should offer to pay the penalty they fix and the odds are they will accept that.

RUSTOMJI: And if they don't, it is jail for me!

GANDHI: The shame is not in the punishment, but the crime. The deed of shame has already been done. The rest is a penance. You must resolve never to smuggle again.

RUSTOMJI: I am entirely in your hands. I shall gladly do whatever you say. Only save me from jail.

GANDHI: Don't be so pessimistic. We must be completely frank. That is our only chance. We must convince the Attorney-General that we are keeping nothing back. Let him see your books, if he wants. The case can then be settled by paying the penalty.

RUSTOMJI: If my honour is saved, that is enough.

(Gandhi embraces Rustomji, who goes out. Kasturbai enters with a cup of cocoa which she gives to Gandhi. Her fingers play with a gold necklace she is wearing.)

GANDHI: Is that the new necklace?

KASTURBAI: Yes, isn't it beautiful? And these bangles, *(Displays them.)* I don't care much for the gold watch. It is too fashionable. I think, this diamond ring is meant for you, it is too big for me.

GANDHI: Beautiful! Yes, they are all beautiful. Must have cost a fortune. Our friends have thought nothing of the expense, have they? The necklace alone must have cost 50 sovereigns at least. I had heard that our friends intended to give me something as a token of their regard for my public work. But I didn't know quite what they were up to. Had I known what to expect, I would have said NO, there and then. Now, I don't know what to do. How can I refuse these gifts? On the other hand, how can I keep them?

KASTURBAI (*With foreboding*): Of course we can keep them.

GANDHI: Throughout last night I have been worrying about this. Can we afford gold necklaces and diamond rings? What is to be done now? There can be only one answer. I cannot keep them. I shall create a trust of these gifts in favour of the community.

KASTURBAI (*Exasperated*): What? Have you no thought for your children?

GANDHI: They would not wish to keep these presents.

KASTURBAI (*Angrily*): You may not need them. Your children may not need them. You know how to cajole them to dance to your tune. I can understand your not letting me wear them. What about our sons' wives, when they marry? They will surely need them. Who knows what will happen tomorrow? I would be the last person to part with gifts so lovingly given.

GANDHI: But the children are very young. When they are grown up, they can take care of themselves.

Surely, we don't want extravagant brides for our sons. If, after all, we have to provide some ornaments for them, why, I am here. You can ask me then.

KASTURBAI: Ask you? Don't I know you by this time. Did you leave me in peace till you had deprived me of my own few jewels? Fancy, your offering to get ornaments for our daughters-in-law, you, who are trying to make sadhus of my boys. No, no. The ornaments will not be returned. And pray, what right have you to my necklace?

GANDHI: But is the necklace for your service or for mine?

KASTURBAI: Service rendered by you is as good as mine. Have I not toiled and moiled for you, day and night? Is that no service? You forced all and sundry on me, making me weep bitter tears, and I slaved for them.

GANDHI (*Gently*): Come, now, try to understand. Am I not urging people to give up jewellery? Are we not training our children for a life of service? Is it right to accept such costly gifts for serving one's people? It flashed upon me last night that my life is pledged to our people. I must give up all wealth, even the desire for children. Never again shall I call anything my own. Ba, have I not spoken of these things often? To whom can I look for help and guidance in my decision except to you, my own wife?

(Kasturbai is in tears. She removes the necklace, the bangles and the ring and offers them in her two hands to Gandhi. Gandhi takes her hands in his.)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE 1

[9 p.m. on 30th January, 1908. A room in the house of Seth Essop Mian in Johannesburg. A servant enters. He lights the lamp and arranges a table, chairs and benches, hastily preparing the room for a meeting.

Soon afterwards, Essop Mian and Kachhalia come in.]

ESSOP MIAN (*Looking at his watch*): The last train from Pretoria should be in by now.

KACHHALIA: Has he been released?

ESSOP MIAN: Can't say for certain. Only if General Smuts has made terms.

KACHHALIA: We can't trust Smuts. He was out to frighten us by the threat of jail. The jails are full to overflowing. He is now changing his tune.

ESSOP MIAN: Probably he is in a fix. He didn't expect such enthusiasm on our part for visiting His Majesty's hotels.

KACHHALIA: For eight years we have been tricked. Now, we shall go down fighting. The British are no better than the Boers. We threw in our lot with them in the Boer War and again in the Zulu revolt. What did we get? Broken pledges, worse, deception. They led us to believe that all would be well for us after the Boer War. Behind our backs Lord Elgin told the Europeans that with the coming self-government they would be free to make their own laws. The Black Act against us was rushed through

the new Parliament in one sitting. They will cheat us again.

ESSOP MIAN : That is a risk we have to take. Apparently there are other risks too. I hear that the Europeans are after you. Is it true?

KACHHALIA : Yes, they have asked me not to take part in Satyagraha. Otherwise, they threaten to press for their dues.

ESSOP MIAN : Have you asked for time?

KACHHALIA : They have refused. I have even offered my stock at cost and book debts due to me to cover the balance. They want cash or I must give in. Government is behind it. They hope to bend me with the threat of insolvency.

ESSOP MIAN : You must let your friends help you out.

KACHHALIA : I won't let them. All of us are in the same boat. If I give in, it will be your turn next. I shall welcome insolvency. It is an honour. But my creditors will get their twenty shillings in the pound.

(Essop Mian is moved and grips Kachhalia's hands. A number of persons come into the room. Among them are Mir Alam and a few other Pathans. After greetings they sit down. Kachhalia and Essop Mian sit behind a table. One chair is kept vacant.)

ESSOP MIAN *(Addressing those present)* : Government want us to call off Satyagraha. They have offered terms. We are to register voluntarily and they will repeal the Black Act. On behalf of the Committee, I suggested they should discuss the offer with Gandhibhai and others in jail, and we would accept

any settlement made. Gandhibhai was taken this morning to Pretoria to see General Smuts. He should be back here soon.

MIR ALAM: I took out a certificate under the old law. It was then decided we should fight the Government. My companions and I gladly agreed. What is this talk again of certificates now?

KACHHALIA: Let me explain, Mir Alam. At the meeting we held last July at Pretoria, I myself swore that I would choose the hangman's noose rather than submit to this unjust law. There is a difference now. If we take out identity certificates we shall do so voluntarily, not under the compulsion of law. (*Seeing Gandhi at the door.*) Oh, here is Gandhibhai.

(*Gandhi comes in and is greeted by all. Essop Mian offers him the vacant chair.*)

ESSOP MIAN: Where are the warders?

GANDHI: Government have released me. Orders have been issued for the release of all Satyagrahi prisoners by tomorrow morning. I met General Smuts, after consultation with our friends in jail. We have come to a settlement. The substance of it you already know.

KACHHALIA: What are the final terms?

GANDHI: We should register voluntarily and not under any law. If the majority of us do so, Government will repeal the Black Act.

KACHHALIA: That is putting the cart before the horse. Are we to surrender our weapons before the Act is repealed? The right order is, first repeal the Act, then we register.

GANDHI : That won't be a compromise. Both parties have to make concessions except on questions of principle. On our side, we won't submit to the Black Act. On their side, to prevent illegal entry of Indians into the Transvaal, Indian settlers must take out identity cards. Our struggle is to remove the stigma of the Black Act.

KACHHALIA : Can we trust Government? Suppose we register and the Black Act remains?

GANDHI : A Satyagrahi should not be afraid of trusting his opponent. Even if the opponent plays us false twenty times, we must be ready to trust him the next time. Implicit faith in human nature is the very essence of our creed.

KACHHALIA : You are too trusting. (*Smiling.*) You will come to grief and bring us all to grief.

GANDHI : What else but grief do you hope for, when you have cast your lot with me? We are fearless and free so long as we have the weapon of Satyagraha in our hands. We may be deceived. But ultimately truth must prevail.

KACHHALIA : Well then, let us continue to be deceived. When at last you see through them, we may not be as strong as we are now to resume our fight.

GANDHI : That means our present strength is not real. If so, we do not deserve to win. Even if we win, the fruit of victory would slip out of our hands.

MIR ALAM : Shall we have to give ten finger-prints?

GANDHI : I am for giving them. Those who object need give only thumb impressions.

MIR ALAM : What will you do yourself?

GANDHI : I shall give ten finger-prints.

MIR ALAM : You have talked and written a lot before about the finger-prints. It was you who told us that only criminals have to give them.

GANDHI : I stand by every word I have said. Under compulsion, it would be a sin to give even our signatures, let alone finger-prints. It is true that I have laid great stress on this question of finger-prints. It was easier to rouse the community to a sense of the gravity of the situation by a reference to such a new and startling feature of the Act.

MIR ALAM : And now you advise us to do exactly the opposite.

GANDHI : What would have been a crime yesterday is the hall-mark of a gentleman today. If you require me by force to salute you and I submit, I shall have demeaned myself. But if, on my own accord, I salute you as a brother, it will be counted to me as righteousness before the All-Righteous. That is why I advise friends to give the finger-prints.

MIR ALAM : So, it is the dog's collar round our necks again. Gandhibhai has a short memory. (*Turning to Gandhi.*) Didn't you say, not many months ago, it is better to die than suffer this disgrace? Didn't you ask us to take an oath with God as witness that we would not submit to the Ordinance if it became law? (*Looking round.*) I don't find Seth Haji Habib here, but I remember well how he swore that he would kill any one who came to take his wife's finger-prints. Are we now to go back on our oath?

GANDHI: There is no question of going back on our oath. We are not submitting to any law when we register voluntarily. Everyone of us should therefore register. It is only when we have fulfilled our part that we can demand that Government should fulfil theirs.

A PATHAN: Enough, enough. We have heard that you have sold us to General Smuts for £15,000. We will never give the finger-prints, nor allow others to do so. I swear with Allah as my witness that I will kill the man who is the first to register.

GANDHI: I do not like our friend's threat. Is it right for one to swear to kill another in the name of the Most High? I hope it is only a fit of passion. Whether it is or not, I pray to God that He graciously permits me to take out the first certificate. Death is the appointed end of all life. To die by the hand of a brother rather than by disease or other ways, is not a matter of sorrow for me. And if death so comes to me, and I am free from bitterness or hatred against my assailant, I believe it will redound to my eternal welfare.

ESSOP MIAN: We have heard Gandhibhai. We must endorse the settlement. Every one of us should take out a certificate at once and explain to the community why we must do so. Will those in favour of the settlement please raise their hands?

(All, except a few Pathans, raise their hands.)

That is settled then. I shall call a public meeting soon. It is getting late. We can disperse now.

(Gandhi with Essop Mian and Kachhalia move towards the door where Mir Alam is standing.)

MIR ALAM (*To Gandhi*): When are you taking out the certificate?

GANDHI: Tomorrow morning. I hope to be the first. I shall give ten finger-prints. If you will come with me, I shall get you one with thumb impressions only.

MIR ALAM: Life is nothing to us compared with our honour. We have sworn not to give our thumb impressions like common criminals. We listened to your words, but now you have deceived us. We have a way with traitors.

(One of the Pathans hits Gandhi from behind. Gandhi faints saying "Hé Rama" (Oh, God!) and falls on the ground. Mir Alam and his companions beat and kick Gandhi. Essop Mian and Kachhalia ward off the blows and are also attacked. There is a hubbub. The Pathans flee. Gandhi is picked up and laid on the table. Mr. Doke, a Baptist Minister and some others come in.)

DOKE (*When Gandhi regains consciousness and bending over him*): How do you feel?

GANDHI: I am all right, Mr. Doke. I have some pain in the teeth and the ribs. Where is Mir Alam?

DOKE: He has been arrested along with his companions.

GANDHI: They should be released.

DOKE: That is all very well. Here you are with your lips and cheek badly lacerated. Probably, your ribs are also broken. The Police want to take you to the hospital, but if you will come to my place, Mrs. Doke and I will look after you as best we can.

GANDHI : Thank you. I shall come with you.

DOKE : We shall get a carriage (*Sends for one.*)

GANDHI : I was to visit Mr. Chamney, the Registrar of Asiatics, tomorrow morning. God willed it otherwise. I wish to be the first to take out a certificate. Mr. Doke, will you get the papers for me, the first thing tomorrow morning? I hope no one else registers before me.

DOKE : Don't tire yourself. I shall arrange with Chamney to keep your name at the head of the list. Now you must rest.

GANDHI : One more thing. Those who attacked me did not know what they were doing. They had their redress in the only way they knew. I must wire at once to the Attorney-General that I do not hold Mir Alam and the others guilty of assaulting me. Will you give me a sheet of paper and a pencil?

(Doke hands over a note-book and a pencil to Gandhi, and raises him gently. With difficulty and obvious pain Gandhi drafts the telegram. He hands back the note-book, smiles happily and closes his eyes.)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

[16th August, 1908. The room as in Scene 1. A meeting of the Satyagraha Committee is in progress. Essop Mian, Gandhi, Kachhalia, Mir Alam and others are present.

A large iron caldron resting on four legs is prominent.]

ESSOP MIAN: I have serious news. General Smuts has gone back on his word. Instead of repealing the Black Act, he has introduced a new law. This law recognises the voluntary certificates but makes further provision for the registration of Asiatics. The whites want our extinction.

GANDHI: The Boers and the British have joined forces. The four colonies are soon to form a Union. Every anti-Indian legislation in any one colony will then be extended to all.

1ST SPEAKER (*In a matter-of-fact tone, but without bitterness*): There you are. We told Gandhibhai that he is credulous. He believes every one. Now the community has to suffer.

GANDHI: My credulity is part of myself. You must take me as you find me.

2ND SPEAKER: It will be very difficult now to rouse the same spirit in our people as before. We have missed the tide.

GANDHI: Does it mean that we have lost our enthusiasm? If any one told me that, I would consider it an insult,

It is not fair to suggest that any one of us is weak-kneed.

2ND SPEAKER : But we can't fight indefinitely.

GANDHI : We cannot impose a time limit on our Satyagraha. It may last a year or many years. It should be all the same to us. The struggle itself is victory. If any one takes to Satyagraha without having measured his own strength and sustains defeat, he not only disgraces himself but brings the weapon of Satyagraha into disrepute.

1ST SPEAKER : What are we to do now?

GANDHI : We wrote to General Smuts that Government's action constitutes a breach of their settlement with us. There is no reply. The law of courtesy does not bind General Smuts. We presented a petition but in vain. As a last resort we have sent him a letter giving a time limit for the reply.

2ND SPEAKER : Is that an ultimatum?

ESSOP MIAN : It is not our word, but Smuts has chosen to describe it as such.

1ST SPEAKER : What did you say in the letter?

ESSOP MIAN : Here is a summary (*Reads out.*) "The point of the agreement between us and General Smuts is that if we registered voluntarily, he on his part should bring forward a bill to validate such registration and to repeal the Asiatic Act. We have carried out our part to the satisfaction of the Government. The Asiatic Act must therefore be repealed. We have sent many communications to General Smuts and have

taken all possible constitutional steps to obtain redress, but to no purpose. We regret that if the Asiatic Act is not repealed in terms of the settlement and if Government's decision to that effect is not communicated to us by the 16th August, 1908, the certificates obtained by us would be burnt and we would humbly and firmly take the consequences." (*Looking up.*) The time limit expires today.

2ND SPEAKER: The time limit might stiffen the Government, and make them reject our terms, which otherwise they might have accepted.

KACHHALIA: The step was taken after due deliberation. The Committee unanimously came to the conclusion that we must do what we thought to be right. What we did is the only straightforward course. We cannot admit any inferiority as human beings in any sense whatever.

1ST SPEAKER: We may burn the certificates, but the Government may ignore the whole thing.

KACHHALIA: We don't intend to sit still. We have already taken the first step. There are several Indians in Natal who possess ancient rights of domicile in the Transvaal. They are to enter the Transvaal without certificates. Seth Daud Mohammed and Parsee Rustomji are leading them. They are expected at the frontier in a couple of days.

1ST SPEAKER: What do we do ourselves?

KACHHALIA: We are to court arrest by hawking without licenses. The sentence will be hard labour. Let there be no illusions. There will be no delicacies in

jail. We will have to eat mealie pap and thank God for it. We shall be put to breaking stones.

(A messenger arrives with a telegram which he gives to Essop Mian.)

ESSOP MIAN *(After reading the telegram):* We had hoped against hope that Government would concede justice at the last moment. When we called this meeting and the public meeting which will be held outside in a few minutes, we expected to be able to announce Government's favourable decision. That is not to be. Here is the telegram from the Government. They regret our decision and announce their inability to change their line of action.

(This statement is received with cheers.) After all, we are to have the good fortune of burning the certificates. Before we proceed to the public meeting, will those present hand over their certificates?

(One by one the certificates collected are thrown into the caldron amidst cheering. Mir Alam walks up to Gandhi.)

MIR ALAM *(Handing over his certificate to Gandhi):* Here is my original certificate. I have done wrong to assault you. I ask forgiveness.

GANDHI: There is nothing to forgive. *(Takes the certificate with joy and presses Mir Alam's hands. Mir Alam goes back.)*

We have already received over 2,000 certificates. These will be burnt in a bonfire at the public meeting.

(Cheering and shouts "burn them, burn them.")

Merely burning the certificates is no crime. It is open to any one to take out a copy tomorrow. If there are any persons who contemplate such a cowardly act, we must make it clear to them that they can have the certificates back. Let us also take note that the struggle will be long. A man cannot borrow faith or courage from others. The doubter is marked out for destruction. We must be resolute unto death. We are fighting with clean weapons. Those within the prison-bars will be free and those outside will be the real prisoners. The Government will be forced to surrender, not to us, but to TRUTH.

CURTAIN

SCENE 3

[Noon on 9th November, 1913, at Teakworth near Johannesburg. An improvised kitchen in the open. There are packages of bread and sugar on a rough wooden trestle which also functions as a bench. A packing case serves as a table and on it is a medicine box. Gandhi is dressed in trousers and shirt of coarse blue cloth and he wears a white cloth cap.]

As the scene opens, he is taking out some sugar and loaves of bread. After a few seconds, an Assistant enters.]

GANDHI : Pillay, have you taken the roll-call?

PILLAY : Yes, Sir, there are 2,013 men, 122 women and 50 children.

GANDHI : Have they all got their rations?

PILLAY : I have just finished distribution. Not much trouble today, Sir, as there is no dhall or rice, but only bread and sugar.

GANDHI : Some more people may be coming from Charlestown before we resume the march. *(Hands over the packets of bread and sugar.)* This is for them.

(Pillay goes out, but returns immediately with an old Sikh and a Pathan.)

PILLAY : There are two more here, Sir. I thought you would like to speak to them.

(Pillay goes out. The old man comes forward, the other squats on the ground.)

GANDHI: What is your name and how old are you?

HARBANSINGH: Harbansingh. I am 75.

GANDHI: I haven't invited old men like you to court jail.

HARBANSINGH: How could I help it when you, your wife and even your boys are going to jail for our sake.

GANDHI: Jail will be too hard for you at your age. You should not join us.

HARBANSINGH: No, please. I must die one of these days. I shall be happy to die in jail.

GANDHI: Very well, then. Will you see Pillay? He will look after you.

(Takes the old man gently by the shoulder and shows him where to go.)

GANDHI *(Peering out)*: It is Polak. You got my telegram?

(Gandhi and Polak come in.)

We are lucky to meet. I was arrested the day before yesterday, just after I had sent you the telegram.

POLAK: I was expecting something like that.

GANDHI: I was about to retire for the night when I heard footsteps. It was a Police officer with a lantern in his hand. I knew what that meant. I roused P. K. Naidu and asked him to resume the march without me at daybreak. I was produced before the Magistrate at Volksrust. I managed to get released on a bail of fifty pounds. Kallenbach had a car ready. You can imagine the enthusiasm and the welcome I got when I rejoined my pilgrim army. I was again

arrested yesterday at Standerton. A Magistrate, this time. Apparently the "coolie lawyer" had received promotion in rank. Naidu and four others were also arrested, but I again managed to get released on my own cognisance of fifty pounds. The case has been remanded till the 21st. Some friends had kept a carriage ready and I rejoined the pilgrims. There should be no trouble till we reach Johannesburg.

(Turning to the Pathan.) What is your name?

IBRAHIM: Syed Ibrahim. I am a striker from the Newcastle mines. *(Turns round and shows his back.)* Look. How severely they have thrashed me. I have let the rascals go for your sake, since such are your orders. I am a Pathan. Pathans never take, but only give a beating.

GANDHI: Well done, brother. That is very brave. We will win through with people of your type.

(Goes to the medicine-chest and then attends to the wounds.)

Go and get your ration. We will be marching soon.

(Sound of women singing bhajans can be heard faintly.)

POLAK: I am glad I came. I had no idea it was anything like this. I never expected to see an army of thousands.

GANDHI: When can you sail?

POLAK: I can get a boat this week. I intend to go to Durban this evening by the corridor train from Charlestown.

GANDHI: You will now be able to give Gokhale an eye-witness account. He is sick and in bed, but

very anxious to know what is happening here. He wants to take up the South African question with the Indian and Imperial Governments.

POLAK : How is that Pathan here? And the women? I thought you had restricted the struggle to the Transvaal Indians since the Black Act applies only to them.

GANDHI : Don't worry, we haven't raised any fresh issues. That must be made clear to Gokhale. When he was here, Government had promised to repeal the poll-tax in Natal. They have now gone back on their pledge. Since Government made a promise and went back on it, the labourers in Natal can now participate in the struggle. Then, there is the insult to our womanhood. The Cape Supreme Court has questioned the validity of Indian marriages. This has never been done before. In the eyes of the law, our wives are no better than concubines.

POLAK : I see. The women have, therefore, been allowed to offer Satyagraha.

GANDHI : Yes. I took the decision after a great deal of heart searching. It is an important step in the emancipation of our women.

POLAK : The whole aspect of the campaign is now changed.

GANDHI : Here is my general strategy. The sisters who had lived in Johannesburg till recently were to re-enter Transvaal and court arrest. But the Police refused to arrest them. I then decided that they should return to Natal without permits. Again, no arrests. They then proceeded to Newcastle and persuaded the miners there to go on strike. This was too much for the Government. The sisters were arrested.

They are now in jail. Simultaneously, I took the step which we had reserved to the last. I decided to sacrifice all. The Phoenix settlers also entered the Transvaal without permits. That was my final offering to the God of Truth. They have also been arrested and jailed.

POLAK: So, you are now left with only the Strikers from Newcastle.

GANDHI: Yes. They were forced to vacate their quarters. But the poor have no fears. They left behind what they could not sell or carry with them. It is no joke to control a multitude of thousands. I had to enforce very strict rules. None is allowed to keep any more clothes than necessary. None is to touch any one's property on the way. They are to be patient if any Europeans abuse or beat them. They are not to resist arrest. The march is to continue even if I am arrested.

POLAK: The morale is wonderful.

GANDHI: The women are in no way behind the men. Two of them had little ones when they started. One died of exposure on the march and the other was drowned while crossing a stream. But the bereaved mothers refused to be dejected and continued their march. One of them said to me: "We must not pine for the dead. They will not come back to us for all our pining. It is the living for whom we must work."

POLAK: The suffering of the women—that will stir India.

GANDHI: I did all I could to avoid all this tragic suffering. From Charlestown, I telephoned General Smuts in Pretoria. I said to his Secretary: "Tell General Smuts that I am fully prepared for the march. There

is the danger that the Europeans may break out into violence against us. If he promises to abolish the poll-tax, I will stop the march. I will not break the law merely for the sake of breaking it. But I am driven to it by inexorable necessity." The reply was that General Smuts will have nothing to do with me.

POLAK (*Looking at his watch*): 3 O'clock. I have just time to go round the camp before catching my train.

(*A European Police officer comes in. He is soon surrounded by Gandhi's 'pilgrims.' Gandhi is taken aside by the Police Officer.*)

OFFICER (*To Gandhi*): I arrest you.

GANDHI: What about the marchers?

OFFICER: We shall see to that.

GANDHI (*To Polak*): Will you take charge of the pilgrims? (*Turning to the marchers.*) You will continue to march and keep the peace.

OFFICER (*Interrupting*): You are now a prisoner and cannot make any speeches.

(*The marchers control their excitement.*)

GANDHI: Very well.

(*As Gandhi is taken away the curtain falls. When it rises again all the bread and sugar bags and the trestle have been removed. Polak is sitting on the box making some notes. Pillay enters.*)

POLAK: Are we ready for the march?

PILLAY: Yes, Sir. Kachhalia Seth has just arrived.

(*Kachhalia comes in.*)

KACHHALIA: I have missed Gandhi narrowly. I am told he was arrested a few hours ago.

POLAK: Yes, his third arrest in three days. We are to proceed to Greylingstad. (*Turning to Pillay.*) You proceed with the march. You know the rules. I shall catch up with you soon. (*Pillay goes out.*) Any news?

KACHHALIA (*Nods*): Government have made arrangements to arrest the whole body of marchers tomorrow morning. Three special trains are drawn up at Balfour to take them to Natal.

POLAK: Good! I can proceed to Durban as soon as the marchers are arrested.

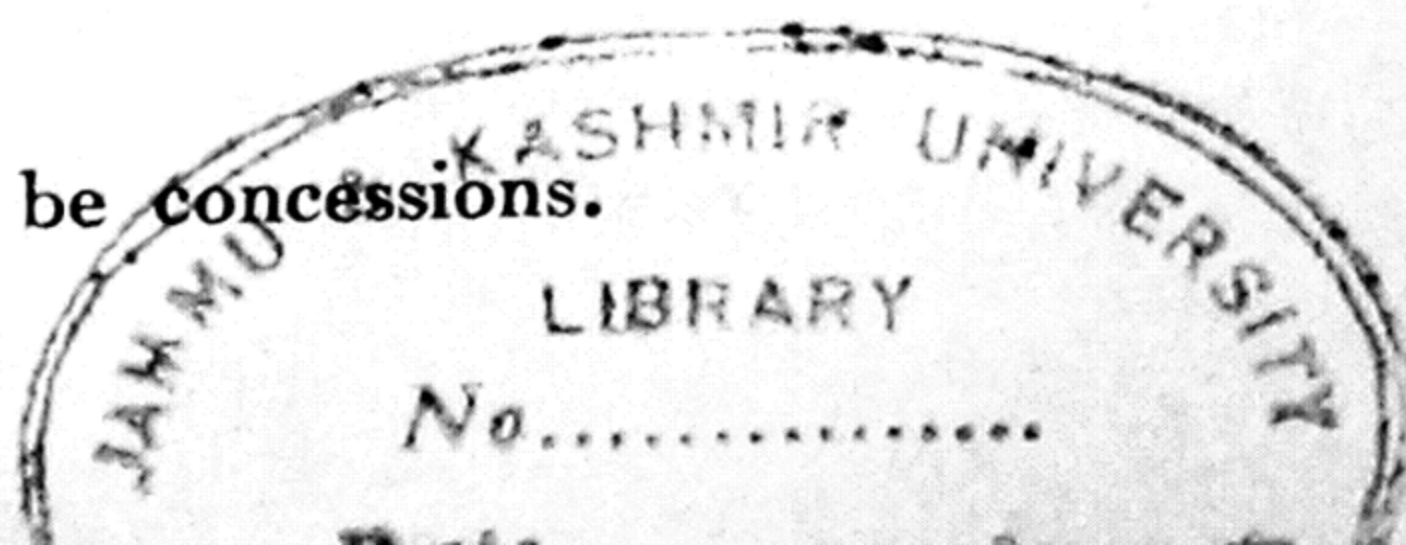
KACHHALIA: The news of the march has spread like wild-fire through the whole of Natal. The Indian miners on the North and South Coasts are expected to strike any time. There are sixty thousand of them.

POLAK: When the flood gates are opened, there is no checking the universal deluge. What will the Government do?

KACHHALIA: It is the beginning of the end. Things are moving fast. Gokhale is sending out C. F. Andrews and Pearson, but before they come, I think, it will be all over. Government cannot keep thousands of innocent men in jail. All the world is waiting to see what General Smuts will do. Our suffering has been our strength. Smuts is getting ready to haul down the flag of repression. The poll-tax will be repealed and Indian marriages will be made legal.

POLAK: That is a great deal. What about the anti-Immigration law?

KACHHALIA: There will be concessions.



POLAK : An honourable settlement will be welcome. If ever there is a breach again, we must be ready to resume the fight.

KACHHALIA : With the settlement, South Africa will lose Gandhi. You and I, Polak, can never forget his comradeship. He came here in 1893—for a month. He has stayed for two decades. His heart is now set on returning to India to devote the rest of his life to serve our people in the homeland. May he find happiness and peace !

POLAK : Gandhi has found his vocation in South Africa, the service of his people. He will suffer much, but there will be a core of happiness in his suffering. In the heat and dust of battle, there will be peace in his innermost heart.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE 1

[Night of the 7th February, 1922—A room in Sabarmathi Ashram. The room is almost dark. Two cots can be seen, one in the background and the other down-stage on the side, both occupied. The furniture includes a spinning-wheel.]

The youth sleeping on the cot down-stage gets up and switches on a dim electric light near the door. He then takes his temperature. He is obviously satisfied with the result. He switches off the light and lies down.

The noise of slippers is heard off-stage. The door opens and Gandhi enters. He leaves his sandals at the door and switches on the light. He is dressed in a loin cloth and carries a thermos flask in his hand. He places the thermos flask on the table near the youth's cot. The young man gets up from the bed and greets Gandhi.]

GANDHI: How do you feel now?

YOUTH: My temperature has been normal all day.

GANDHI: As I expected. They call me an incorrigible quack, but I get results, don't I? Shall I switch off the light?

YOUTH: Not yet, Bapu. May I come with you to Bardoli tomorrow? I would like to be there from the very start of the no-tax campaign.

GANDHI: There is no need to hurry. There will be no mass civil disobedience until the Congress Working Committee meets on the 12th instant.

YOUTH : But on the 1st of this month, you gave notice to Lord Irwin that you will begin mass civil disobedience in Bardoli in seven days. The notice ends tonight.

GANDHI : God has willed otherwise. While you have been on the sick-bed, a most frightful thing happened at Chauri Chaura. I kept it back from you lest you get excited. Day before yesterday, 21 constables and a Sub-Inspector of Police were shut up and set on fire. They all perished in the flames. I could never believe that our people are capable of such fiendish horrors. In the name of Swaraj! Swaraj stinks in my nostrils!

YOUTH : Yes, Bapu, it is enough to make one despair. (*Pleading.*) Must have been a case of mob frenzy—under grave provocation.

GANDHI : If the Government runs amok, are we also to go mad? The whole key to success lies in Non-violence. To the extent we deny the Eternal Truth, to that extent we are bound to fail. We cannot put out fire with fire. I say, do not repay madness with madness, but repay madness with sanity, and the whole situation is ours. If the ocean catches fire, with what shall we quench it?

YOUTH : What will be our next step, Bapu?

GANDHI : I shall ask the Working Committee to postpone mass civil disobedience indefinitely. (*The youth is dismayed.*) During the last seven years I have striven to foster self-respect in the nation. Communal unity, removal of untouchability and social justice for all; and the rescue of the masses from economic slavery. Non-violent resistance to authority enthroned in arrogance. These lessons had to be learnt by the people before I launched mass civil disobedience. But

my hands were forced by the Khilafat and Punjab wrongs, the Rowlatt Act and Jallianwala Bagh, terrorism and frightfulness. We had to rescue freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of the Press from paralysis. I couldn't wait any longer. The campaign in Bardoli was to have commenced last December. Then came the riots in Bombay during the visit of the Prince of Wales in November.

YOUTH : Surely, Bapu, you are not going to switch off the whole current again? You cannot punish the entire nation for the fault of one village. Why should a town on the Indus be penalised if a village at Cape Comorin errs?

GANDHI : I have devoted my life to the service of Truth. Shall I be true to myself if I now disown Chauri Chaura? I cannot allow myself to be separated from any section of my people, least of all, from those who are wrong. I shall be criticised, but I have to sound my depths again.

(A clock strikes ten.)

GANDHI (*Rousing himself*) : It is late. You ought to be sleeping.

YOUTH : I tried to sleep, but couldn't.

GANDHI : Then let me get you something to drink, something hot.

YOUTH : But the kitchen is closed. Ba is asleep.

GANDHI : You leave that to me. What will you have?

YOUTH : A cup of hot coffee would be nice.

GANDHI : Coffee? I am not sure. But wait.

(Gandhi goes out with the thermos flask. The youth picks up a takli and starts to spin. It is

obvious that he is a beginner. After a few seconds, Gandhi returns with a tumbler of coffee.)

GANDHI (*Offering it to the youth*): Here is your heart's desire. (*The youth hesitates to drink.*) Coffee must be taken hot.

(The youth drinks the coffee. Gandhi picks up the takli, and as if speaking to himself.)

Think of it. If one in every fifty in this country spins for just one hour daily we would add fifty thousand rupees to our national wealth every day. Is there anything to equal this for harnessing every single idle minute of our impoverished millions? When spinning, one cannot help feeling that one is adding to the nation's wealth.

(Gandhi puts down the takli and turns to the youth.)

Now give me the glass and go to sleep. Don't whisper a word of this to Ba. She will come down on both of us. Forget it, it is all a dream.

(Gandhi takes the glass and goes out, switching off the light. The youth goes to bed. There is a clatter off stage. The sleeper in the other cot wakes up. It is Kasturbai. She walks towards the door and meets Gandhi there with the tumbler in his hand, as she switches on the light. They come forward.)

KASTURBAI: What is it?

GANDHI: Our young friend wanted a cup of coffee. It seems he could not get sleep without it.

KASTURBAI (*Looking at the sleeping youth and shaking her head*): I thought I had locked up that coffee where nobody could find it. Why didn't you call me?

GANDHI: You were fast asleep. I didn't want to disturb you.

KASTURBAI: Yes, you thought I was a lazy-bones and wouldn't like to be disturbed. You are always like that.

GANDHI: Certainly not. Who would ever call you lazy? I was breaking a rule, you know, and I was afraid of what you might say.

KASTURBAI (*Throwing her head back*): Ha, you afraid! Is there anything on earth that you are afraid of? Haré Ram!

GANDHI: But, you need some rest, you know, Ba.

KASTURBAI: So it is me that wants rest and not you, working day and night all these months?

GANDHI: I may soon get plenty of rest. It won't be long now before I have an arrest-cure.

KASTURBAI (*Anxiously*): You will be arrested soon? Who will look after you in jail? I wish they would arrest me too. I wish I could come with you to jail.

GANDHI: Yes, Ba. If the Government only knew! It is you who should be arrested first. Did I not learn my first lessons in passive resistance from you?

(Ba cannot resist Gandhi's good humour. She also breaks into a smile.)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

[18th March, 1922. The Court of the Sessions Judge of Ahmedabad at Shahibag. The Court room is full of people, amongst whom is Sir J. T. Strangman, Advocate-General, Bombay.]

Gandhi enters accompanied by fellow-prisoner, Shankerlal Banker, when all rise.

Soon afterwards the Judge enters and takes his seat, all standing.]

JUDGE (*Looking over the papers placed before him*):
There is a slight mistake in the charges as at first framed. I will now ask that the amended charges be read out.

CLERK (*Reading out*): You, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, stand charged with offences alleged to have been committed by you and punishable under Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code, that is, that you wrote and published or caused to be published three articles in the issues of *Young India*, dated September 29, December 15, 1921, and February 23, 1922, entitled "Tampering with loyalty," "The puzzle and its solution" and "Shaking the manes," respectively.

That you Shankerlal Banker, as the alleged Printer and Publisher of *Young India*, did publish the above-mentioned articles.

That you both wilfully published them or caused them to be published with a view to bringing into hatred and contempt and exciting disaffection towards His Majesty's Government established by law in British India.

JUDGE : The law requires that the charge should not only be read out, but it should be explained. In this case it would not be necessary for me to say much by way of explanation. The charge in each case is that of bringing into hatred or contempt, or exciting disaffection towards, His Majesty's Government established by law in British India.

Both the accused are charged with three offences under Section 124-A, contained in the articles mentioned, alleged to have been written by Mr. Gandhi and printed by Mr. Banker.

The words "hatred and contempt" are words, the meaning of which is sufficiently obvious. The word "disaffection" is defined under the Section and includes disloyalty to Government and feelings of enmity.

I now call upon the accused to plead to the charges. (*Turning to Gandhi.*) Mr. Gandhi, do you plead guilty or claim to be tried?

GANDHI : I plead guilty to all the charges.

JUDGE (*Turning to Banker*) : Mr. Banker, do you plead guilty or do you claim to be tried?

BANKER : I plead guilty.

STRANGMAN (*Rising*) : Your Honour, my submission is that there should be a full trial notwithstanding that the accused have pleaded guilty.

JUDGE : I do not agree with Counsel. I do not believe that the mere recording of evidence which Counsel has called for, would make any difference in the trial, one way or the other. I therefore propose to accept the pleas, but I am prepared to hear anything that

Counsel might have to say, or the accused wish to say, on the sentence.

(Gandhi smiles at the decision.)

Nothing further remains but to pass sentence. But before doing so, I would like to hear Sir James Strangman on the charges against the accused and on their pleas.

STRANGMAN: The chief point I want to make is that the matter which forms the subject of the present charges is part of a campaign to spread disaffection openly and to overthrow Government.

As to the sentence, that is entirely for the Court to decide. But I would ask leave to refer to the articles before the Court in order to ascertain what the facts are.

JUDGE: There is not the least objection to that.

STRANGMAN: These articles are not isolated. They form part of an organised campaign to spread disaffection. I shall read out a few extracts. *(Reading out.)*
“June 8.—It is the duty of a non-co-operator to preach disaffection towards the existing Government and to prepare the country for Civil Disobedience.”

There is also an article in the same issue on
“Disaffection—a virtue.”

“July 28.—We have to destroy the system.

September 30.—A non-co-operator worth his name should preach disaffection.” *(Lays down the papers.)*

These are writings of an educated man and a recognised leader, not the writings of an obscure man. To what results must a campaign of this nature inevitably

lead? I shall only refer to recent examples, the loss of life and destruction of property in Bombay last November and the recent murders of Chauri Chaura involving many people in misery. No doubt in these articles, non-violence is insisted upon. But, I ask, is it any use preaching non-violence when the writer openly instigates people to overthrow the Government? The answer to that question comes from Chauri Chaura. The Court may take these circumstances into account in sentencing the accused.

JUDGE : Mr. Gandhi, do you wish to make a statement on the question of sentence?

GANDHI : I would like to make a statement.

JUDGE : Have you got it in writing?

GANDHI : Yes, but I shall first read it out, if I may. (*The Judge nods assent.*) I would also like to say that the learned Advocate-General has been entirely fair to me. It is true that to preach disaffection towards the existing system of Government has become almost a passion with me. I had either to submit to that system which in my view had done irreparable harm to my country or incur the risk of the fury of my people bursting forth when they understood the truth from my lips. It is impossible for me, therefore, to dissociate myself from the outrages of Bombay and the diabolical crimes of Chauri Chaura. I am deeply sorry that my people went mad. I knew that I was playing with fire. Nevertheless, if I am set free I would still do the same.

I do not plead any extenuating act. I do not ask for mercy. I am here to invite and cheerfully submit to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me,

for what, in law, is a deliberate crime and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen.

I now come to my statement.

(Reading out.) “I owe it to the Indian public and the public in England that I should explain why from a staunch loyalist and co-operator, I have become an uncompromising disaffectionist and non-co-operator.

My public life began in 1893 in South Africa, in troubled weather. My first contact with British authority in that country was not of a happy character. I discovered that, I had no rights as a man because I was an Indian.

But I was not baffled. I thought that this treatment of Indians was an excrescence upon a system that was intrinsically and mainly good. Consequently when the existence of the Empire was threatened in 1899 by the Boer challenge, I raised a volunteer ambulance corps and served at several actions that took place for the relief of Ladysmith. Similarly, in 1906, I raised a stretcher bearer party and served to the end of the Zulu revolt. On both these occasions I received medals and was even mentioned in despatches. For my work in South Africa, I was given by Lord Hardinge a Kaisar-i-Hind Gold Medal.

When the war broke out in 1914, I raised a voluntary ambulance corps in London. Later, when a special appeal was made for recruits by Lord Chelmsford at the War Conference in Delhi in 1917, I struggled at the cost of my health to raise a corps.

In all these efforts, I was actuated by the belief that it was possible by such service to gain a status of full equality in the Empire for my countrymen.

The first shock came in the shape of the Rowlatt Act, a law designed to rob the people of all real freedom. I felt called upon to lead an intensive agitation against it. Then followed the Punjab horrors, beginning with the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh and culminating in crawling orders, public floggings and other indescribable humiliations. I discovered too that the plighted word of the Prime Minister to the Muslims of India was not being fulfilled.

In spite of all that, I fought for co-operation hoping that the Prime Minister would redeem his promise.

But all that hope was shattered. The promise to the Muslims was not to be redeemed. The Punjab crime was white-washed. The semi-starved masses of India were slowly sinking to lifelessness. Little do the people realise that the Government established by law in British India is carried on for exploiting them. As regards political cases, my experience is that, in nine out of every ten, the convicted men were totally innocent. Their crime consisted in the love of their country. In my humble opinion, non-co-operation with evil is as much a duty as is co-operation with good. There are two courses open to you, the Judge. If you feel that the law you are called upon to administer is evil and I am innocent, you must resign your post and dissociate yourself with evil. If you believe, *that* law to be good and my activity is against the public weal, you must inflict on me the severest penalty. There is no third course.

(Gandhi hands over the statement to the Judge.)

JUDGE (*Addressing Gandhi*): Mr. Gandhi, you have made my task easy in one way by pleading guilty to the

charge. The law is no respecter of persons. Nevertheless, it will be impossible to ignore the fact that you are in a different category from any person I have ever tried or am likely to have to try. In the eyes of millions of your countrymen, you are a patriot and a great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble, and of even saintly life. I have to deal with you in one character only. It is my duty to judge you as a man subject to the law, who, by his own admission, has broken the law and committed what to an ordinary man must appear to be a grave offence against the State. I do not forget that you have consistently preached against violence. I am willing to believe that you have, on many occasions, done much to prevent violence. But it passes my capacity to understand how you could have continued to believe that violence would not be the inevitable consequence of your activities. There are few people in India who do not sincerely regret that you should have made it impossible for any Government to leave you at liberty. But it is so. I am trying to balance what is due to you against what appears to me to be necessary in the public interest. I propose to follow the precedent of a similar case that was decided some twelve years ago, the case against Bal Gangadhar Tilak, under the same section. I feel it my duty to pass upon you a sentence of six years simple imprisonment. You will not consider it unreasonable, I think, that you should be classed with Mr. Tilak. If the course of events in India should make it possible for the Government to reduce the period and release you, no one will be better pleased than I.

JUDGE (*Turning to Banker*): Mr. Banker, I assume you have been to a large extent under the influence of your chief. The sentence that I propose to pass upon you is simple imprisonment for one year and a fine of one thousand rupees, or an additional six months' simple imprisonment, in default.

GANDHI : May I say one word before we part?

(The Judge nods assent.)

You have done me the honour of recalling the trial of the late Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. I want to say that it is the proudest privilege to be associated with his name. The sentence is as light as any judge would inflict on me. I must also say that I could not have expected greater courtesy.

(The Judge leaves. Gandhi's face is wreathed in smiles. People crowd round him sobbing and fall at his feet. As people take leave of Gandhi, the Police move to take him away.)

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE 1

[The 15th of December, 1929. The Drawing-room of Motilal Nehru's residence at Allahabad. It is luxuriously furnished in the Western style and Motilal is reading the draft of his son Jawaharlal's speech as President of the forthcoming session of the Indian National Congress.]

Motilal is smoking a cigar. Some glasses, a box of cigars, etc., are on a side-table near him.

After a few seconds, Jawahar enters carrying a small leather case. He collects some papers and books from the room and returns to a chair to pack them into the case.]

MOTILAL: What time is your train?

JAWAHAR (*Looking at his watch*): Oh, there is more than an hour yet.

MOTILAL: I have been reading through your Presidential speech. (*Offering the draft to Jawahar, who puts it into the case.*) I am glad to see that you have dropped the "Workers' and Peasants' Republic" which you were advocating at the Trade Union Federation at Nagpur.

JAWAHAR (*Smiling*): I decided that the "Workers' and Peasants' Republic" can wait. For the present, independence, Poorna Swaraj, will satisfy me. I am surprised at my own moderation. I hope I won't lose my hard-earned reputation as an extremist!

MOTILAL (*Laughing*): I think you are running a grave risk! But tell me how did the delegates at Nagpur react to the Congress creed of non-violence.

JAWAHAR: It is too much to expect them to be enthusiastic over giving up direct action. That force is wicked is an argument of the weak, who cannot strike effectively. The picture of a person squatting humbly on the ground, inviting chastisement and praying for the conversion of the oppressor, is not very impressive. On the other hand, one can't help admiring the man who squares up for an honest fight.

MOTILAL: So, you reject non-violence?

JAWAHAR: It is a question of being realistic. We should judge the issue on practical grounds. We have neither the means nor the training for organised violence. Sporadic violence is a confession of despair. I reject the way of violence because it promises no substantial results.

MOTILAL (*Good-humouredly*): Well, that is something. Gandhiji will be pleased. Of course, he insists on non-violence in faith, not as a policy. His emphasis is on the means, not the ends.

JAWAHAR: Gandhiji is marvellous. You know how deeply I love him. But there are times though, when I can't pretend to understand him. When he mixes up religion and politics, for instance. Surely, in this country what we want is not more, but less religion, that is, the religion of the priest and the panda. Gandhiji is the one man who could cleanse Hinduism and sweep its sticks and stones into the sea. But he says that the idol is a crutch that supports the masses

in their religious faith. Will they ever learn to walk, till they have thrown the crutches away? At times, he seems to prefer negation to fulfilment. He would regard the Taj Mahal, I suppose, only as a monument of sweated labour.

MOTILAL: I see what you mean. All the same, what matters is not perfection but consecration. Gandhiji has to be understood.

JAWAHAR: If I have failed to understand him, it is not through lack of trying. I don't see any need to reject beauty, to cling to decrepitude, to glorify suffering. I enjoy life and refuse to consider it a thing of sin. I am not much interested in what happens after death. The problems of this life are sufficiently absorbing to fill my mind. It is the way of life that interests me, how to improve it and enrich it, while conforming to it.

MOTILAL: It is all a question of first and last things. The first step, Swaraj, is enough for Gandhiji. It completely absorbs him for the present. He is impatient to see India free and his passion for Swaraj is edged with an iron determination. He is getting ready for action. As you know, he and I were to meet Lord Irwin today to discuss the proposed Round Table Conference, but the meeting had to be postponed for a week, till the 23rd December. (*Pause.*) Well, what are we to do with the Round Table Conference?

JAWAHAR: The R. T. C. is a snare. The Viceroy's announcement is conciliatory, but courteous phrases are a poor substitute for hard facts. To India, Wedgwood Ben announces that there is a change in policy. In the next breath, he tells Parliament that Britain's policy

is not changed, because it is in the Preamble, the Preamble is in the Act and the Act is in the laws of England.

MOTILAL : Yet, I am convinced that the R. T. C. is a great opportunity. It is an opportunity for a peaceful solution. Don't forget that the Conference is our own idea. Congress has been asking for just that, for years.

JAWAHAR : But is the success of the Conference certain? Britain regards India's freedom as a British question to be decided by the British Parliament. If Britain has its way, the Conference will be used to demonstrate the extent of disagreement between Hindus and Muslims, the Princes and the People and God knows what else. There is only one thing to do. We must maintain the war mentality. Haven't we gained more by a vigorous boycott of the Simon Commission, than by co-operation?

MOTILAL : Look at it this way. We were faced with a deadlock after the appointment of the Simon Commission. Lord Irwin would not take the lead in resolving it, unless he had Congress support. He held a discussion with us and the Moderates and the idea of the Conference emerged. When Lord Irwin went to England in the summer, he took with him an assurance of our support. There was little chance of his mission succeeding. Then came the unexpected change in the British Government and the advent of the Labour party in office. We have welcomed the new policy.

JAWAHAR : That is all very well. But what happens to our Calcutta resolution? Didn't we decide to change our creed to independence if there was no Dominion

Status by the end of this year? Dominion Status won't come in the next 16 days.

MOTILAL: But there is the Delhi manifesto. We promised to co-operate with His Majesty's Government to evolve a Dominion constitution. On conditions of course. I am sure Lord Irwin will concede our points. There will be general conciliation and an amnesty for political prisoners—in fact, I understand a list has already been prepared. And Congress will be given effective representation.

JAWAHAR (*Shaking his head*): Sorry, father, but that is not enough. I have no doubts in my own mind. Did we mean what we said in the Calcutta resolution last year, or was it a piece of bluff? There is only one goal now, Complete Independence, Poorna Swaraj. (*Pause.*) Another thing. Dare we leave out of account that secret, silent band of young men and women who want to see their country free at any cost? Are they not as patriotic as the best of us? Have they not sacrificed much? They will not be allured by our speeches, resolutions and conferences which lead to nothing. Action alone will satisfy them.

MOTILAL (*With slight impatience*): Hasn't Gandhiji said he is dying for co-operation? Gandhiji holds the trump-cards. Let no one think he is a spent bullet. The nation will follow only where he leads.

JAWAHAR (*A little heated*): Well, none of us can say what we can achieve and when. Success often comes to those who dare and act. (*Pause.*) As for myself, father, you would not want me to surrender my judgment. That I will not, even to Gandhiji and

the whole country behind him. I prefer the open sea with all its storms and tempests. (*There is silence for a minute, then Jawahar looks at his watch and gets up picking up his case.*) I think I had better be going now.

MOTILAL: One minute. (*Jawahar sits down.*) I think we can resolve the issue before you leave for Lahore. (*A few minutes of pregnant silence. They both rise.*) It boils down to this. Shall we demand from the Viceroy an assurance that the Conference will meet, not to discuss *when* Dominion Status will be established, but to frame a Dominion Constitution? If such an assurance is refused, shall we turn our backs on the Conference and organise a campaign for independence, or shall we give the R. T. C. a trial?

The Conference is an arena of our own choosing, where we shall excel. What better weapons can we ask for than those of logic, persuasion and compromise? I feel in my bones that we could dominate the Conference. It looked that at last Dominion Status was within reach. We could grasp it before—I die. (*Pauses with emotion.*)

But you are right, Jawahar. The Conference is a delusion and a snare. I do see now that past dreams and present realities go ill together. Gandhiji—he never looks back. His gaze is ever focussed on the goal. We must reject the R. T. C. unless it meets on the basis of full Dominion Status. That is what Gandhiji means when he demands “a change of heart.” (*Pause.*) If Lord Irwin rejects our demand, we shall put out to the open sea with Gandhiji at the helm. (*With a sigh of relief.*) And we shall be saved all the wrangling in London. How

could I have imagined that the Conference could succeed? With the minorities behaving like so many poor relations, with Jinnah getting more and more implacable. (*Looks at his watch.*) It is time for your train. (*Motilal places his hands on Jawahar's shoulders.*) God-speed, Jawahar.

(*Father and son move towards the door. At the door, Jawahar turns round and they clasp each other for a minute. Jawahar goes out. Motilal stands lost in thought. There is the sound of a door closing. Motilal slowly walks towards his chair.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

[Afternoon of 11th March, 1930, the eve of Gandhi's march to Dandi. The Hall of Sabarmathi Ashram. There is a raised wooden seat, with a spinning-wheel, where Gandhi sits during discussions.]

As the curtain rises, a few people are present awaiting Gandhi's arrival, and a few more people come in during the scene.

Two youths standing front-stage are engaged in conversation. We may label one of them a "critic" and the other a "disciple".]

CRITIC: We are wasting our time here. All that the great Mahatma has done so far is to send another of his letters to the Viceroy. This time, through an Englishman; as if that will make any difference.

DISCIPLE: Wait and see. The little man in there is the supreme realist. He is the only real revolutionary in the country.

CRITIC: For the life of me I can't see how the Mahatma picking up a pinch of salt, a thing which he himself hasn't used for the last six years, can bring us Independence. We shall set the whole world laughing at us.

DISCIPLE: That pinch of salt is just a symbol. It is a symbol which the masses can understand. The Salt-tax touches the pocket of every man, woman and child in India. The starving millions, the sick and the maimed, it reaches all alike.

CRITIC: Very well, then. Let us assume that one fine morning the Mahatma will wade into the sea and walk back picking up a pinch of salt from the sea-shore. That, I suppose, will be the signal for a general trek towards the coast. The world will no doubt be watching. It is good showmanship, I concede. But what will it amount to? If the police leave us alone, we shall get tired of it soon enough. The whole thing will fizzle out in a fortnight.

DISCIPLE (*Shaking his head*): The campaign this time will be a grim reality. We know that the Police are being trained with lathis in the technique of physical terrorism. I hear that the Home Member himself is on the job. There will be revolt everywhere.

CRITIC: Revolt? What for? The Round Table Conference has been accepted by all except the Congress.

DISCIPLE: The self-styled leaders who have accepted the R. T. C., whom do they lead except themselves? What about the masses, the peasants and the workers? They will follow Gandhiji. The peasants need no incitement to refuse taxes. They simply cannot pay even their rents and debts. If the campaign succeeds, every class of people in India stands to gain, except a few pampered officials. The merchants and the industrialists, no less than the peasant and the worker.

CRITIC: But what can they do to the Government?

DISCIPLE: The campaign will spread to non-payment of taxes and the boycott of foreign goods. That will pinch the Government. If nothing more, the Government will look ludicrous torturing thousands of innocent people who will not raise their hands even

in self-defence. It may be a domestic quarrel, but the neighbours will have something to say. Government will have to come to terms with Gandhiji.

(A Secretary enters and requests silence. Gandhi comes in with some leaders. He sits down on the raised wooden seat, others squatting all around him. He waits for complete silence before he speaks.)

GANDHI : The nation has taken the pledge of independence in peace and tranquillity. I thank God for the unity shown by the people. It is time for action. We, who believe in non-violence, must marshal all our resources and act. If we do not, we must own our incapacity and retire from the field of battle.

CRITIC : Mahatmaji, the burden of your song is independence, but your minimum demand is not even Dominion Status. You have declared that there will be no talk of civil disobedience if Government concedes eleven minor points, such as abolition of Salt-tax and reduction in land revenue. Don't you think, Mahatmaji, that if you have no consistent programme, it is time you made way for others?

GANDHI : There is a method in my inconsistencies. Freedom when it comes must be felt in the remotest village. Mere withdrawal of the English, is not independence. By defining eleven concrete points, I have given a body to the illusive word "Independence". If you have the steadfastness to follow my programme, Poorna Swaraj is near.

CRITIC : Do you think you can convert our rulers by inflicting suffering on ourselves?

GANDHI: One ought to have the strength to die, not to kill. History confirms that such courage and suffering will convert the stoniest hearts. Swaraj obtained without sacrifice never endures.

CRITIC: Surely, Mahatmaji, the British understand only the argument of force.

GANDHI: I know that people like me impede the progress of violent revolution, but the terrorist impedes my progress, more than I do this. (*Smiling.*) You call me Mahatma. Only mahatmas know the woes of mahatmas. You have never yet given me a fair chance. I want full suspension of the activity of the terrorist. If it will please him, I am even ready to admit that I dread him much more than I dread Lord Irwin's ordinances.

CRITIC: I understand that you have received a cryptic letter addressed to Comrade Gandhi giving you three years to persevere with your non-violence.

GANDHI: Yes, the danger lies only in one direction. In the outbreak of violence. Think for a moment; how is it that you have all come here quite fearlessly? Would you have come if you had to face rifle shots? But you have no fear of rifle shots. Why? Supposing, I had announced that I would launch a violent campaign—not with rifles—even with sticks or stones—do you think Government would have left us free. But now the Government is puzzled and perplexed.

CRITIC: How will the breach of the salt laws help us?

GANDHI: Supposing ten men in each of our 700,000 villages come forward to disobey the salt laws. What do you think the Government can do? Dare they

blow the peaceful resisters out of a cannon's mouth? If we bestir ourselves, we shall tire this Government out in a very short time. I want you, therefore, to understand the meaning of our struggle. I do not want any money from you, but I want you to take courage in both hands and join the campaign which will be fierce and prolonged.

CRITIC (*At last convinced by Gandhi's sincerity*): Mahatmaji, I am at your service. I shall take my marching orders from you.

(He bows down before Gandhi as the curtain falls. Strains of a devotional song can be heard for a few moments when the curtain rises again on the same scene. Now the hall is full to overflowing and there are throngs outside, craning their necks with expectation for the arrival of Gandhi. Gandhi comes in with a stave in his hand and continuous cheering breaks out. He turns from side to side acknowledging the greeting. Outwardly, he alone is free from excitement.)

Gandhi stands for a moment with his arms outstretched. When silence is at last restored, he begins to speak.)

GANDHI: Today you find me ready to do that for which the nation has been yearning for the past ten years. Not many days back, I had declared that I saw nothing on the horizon to warrant civil resistance. But suddenly, as in a flash, I saw the light. Self-confidence returned. The voice within is clear. I must put forth all my effort or retire altogether and for all time from public life. I feel, now is the time or never and so I am out for battle.

Before taking the risk which I have dreaded to take all these years, I approached the Viceroy to find a way out. I asked on bended knees for bread and received a stone instead. The British nation responds only to force. India is a vast prison-house. I regard it as my sacred duty to break the mournful monotony of the compulsory peace that is choking the heart of the nation.

I shall now tell you of my plan of campaign. You may take it as my last will and testament. I shall march tomorrow to Dandi, to the sea. When I reach the sea, I shall give the signal to the nation to start civil disobedience. If I am arrested before that, then my arrest will be the signal. No one should be daunted. The conductor of this fight is God and not I. He dwells in the heart of all. If we have faith, God will guide us.

Once the signal is given, it would be open to any one who would take the risk of prosecution, to manufacture salt wherever and whenever he wishes. India's self-respect, in fact, her all, is symbolised in a handful of salt in the Satyagrahi's hand. Let the fist holding it, therefore, be broken, but let there be no voluntary surrender of the salt. Let every village manufacture or fetch contraband salt. The breach of the law should be open, and in no way stealthy.

In every house, young and old should begin hand spinning. There should be *bonfires* of foreign cloth. Hindus, Muslims, Parsees and Christians should stand united as brothers. Hindus should regard none as untouchables. They should be content with what

remains after the minorities have been satisfied. Students should leave Government schools. Government servants should resign from service. Lawyers should give up their practice. Women should picket liquor and opium shops. Let all withdraw their co-operation in all possible ways.

For me, there is no turning back. Whether I am alone, or joined by thousands, I would rather die a dog's death and have my bones licked by dogs than that I should return to this ashram a broken man. Either I should return with what I want, or let my dead body float in the ocean.

CURTAIN

ACT V

SCENE 1

[The morning of Tuesday, the 13th January, 1948. Gandhi's room in Birla House, New Delhi. The room contains a low bed, a writing-desk, a spinning-wheel, a stool and a vase of flowers.]

Eighteen years have passed since the last scene. Gandhi dressed in loin cloth with a shawl over his shoulders, enters the room with Vallabhbhai Patel.]

PATEL : Bapu, I have come to implore you to postpone your fast. The cause you have at heart will be best served by doing so.

GANDHI : I have made the decision to begin the fast today. God is my sole counsellor. A tempest has been raging within me for some months. Is this our new freedom, when no Muslim is safe in our Capital city? The faith of a lifetime is at stake. I shall never acquiesce in failure. When nothing else avails, what can I do but lay my head in God's lap in surrender?

PATEL : I am not asking you to give up the fast. But would postponement by a few days make any difference? Refugees have been pouring into Delhi. Men and women who had to flee from their ancestral homes—who will never return to the soil which they had watered with their sweat and where their dead lie buried. Most of them have lost their all—even hope. How strong must men be to bear all this? Bapu, give them a little time to regain their sanity.

GANDHI : Can we condone madness even for a moment? Riot and counter-riot have been storming through the land for months. Calcutta, Noakhali, then Bihar, again Calcutta and now Delhi. I have swallowed the full bitterness to the dregs. The people must pull down the barriers of hatred or they must destroy me first.

PATEL : We are not responsible for all this hatred and bitterness. Before the partition, the Muslim slogan was "either a divided India or a destroyed India." Jinnah now wants Pakistan to be an Islamic State. There is no room in it for Hindus, Sikhs or Christians. Pakistan has unleashed the hounds of communal terror.

GANDHI : Are we then to retaliate? If, today, the answer to that is yes, tomorrow we shall be saying "attack is the best defence." Where will it end? There is only one course. Even if every Hindu and Sikh is killed in Pakistan, no Muslim here must come to harm.

PATEL : Bapu, I assure you that we shall protect the Muslims in India by all possible means. The refugees have been without shelter for weeks and some of them moved into empty Muslim houses. The housing shortage has created a problem and has been the cause of some unpleasant incidents.

GANDHI : And we have connived at it. Have not Mosques and Muslim tombs been occupied? (*Patel nods.*) Unless we stop these things, there is no hope for us. Whatever Muslims in Pakistan may do, there should be no retaliation. Vallabhbhai, have you not been saying that Muslims in India cannot be trusted?

PATEL : Can we trust the League Muslims who loathed us till yesterday, and who now protest their loyalty?

GANDHI : There are forty million Muslims in India. Are we to distrust them all? Are we to spy on them or segregate them? Can we deny them a place in our national life?

PATEL : The Muslims in India are on trial. They must show by their actions that they are loyal. Pakistan is out to use them as a fifth column.

GANDHI : That reminds me. Are we paying Pakistan the fifty-five crores of rupees from the cash balances?

PATEL : Certainly not. I for one can never agree to it so long as she wages war against us in Kashmir. We have clear evidence that regular soldiers of the Pakistan Army are amongst the raiders.

GANDHI : Even so, have we the right to withhold the payment?

PATEL : Why should we pay her money to buy arms and ammunition with which to shoot our soldiers?

GANDHI : Pakistan will not lack arms and ammunition if she is determined to wage war. We are not concerned with her morality. We must look to our own. Pakistan must be paid her due share.

PATEL : There is more in it than morality. The question has to be viewed in all its bearings. I wish you would at least consult somebody, who can take a detached view.

GANDHI : I have done so. I raised the subject with Lord Mountbatten last evening after my decision to

begin a fast had been announced. In his view it is neither wise, nor politic to withhold payment.

PATEL (*Shrugging his shoulders*): As you wish. I shall bring this up without delay before the Cabinet. What else do you wish us to do?

GANDHI: When I am satisfied that there is a reunion of hearts of all communities, my fast would end.

PATEL: How can we assure you of that?

GANDHI: Their mosques and tombs should be given back to the Muslims. They should be able to move about freely without fear. Hindus and Sikhs should also not object to the return of the Muslims who went to Pakistan and who may now wish to come back to their homes.

PATEL: Bapu, you have my solemn word that we shall work for these objectives. Success will be surer and quicker if you give up your fast. A fast now will only lead to opposition and bitterness. The Sikhs are already very restive.

GANDHI: Vallabhbhai, there was a time when we marched in the same direction, on the same road, step by step. In 1930, when I marched to the sea to give the signal to begin civil disobedience against the British, I felt that the whole nation was marching with me. You, I have always looked upon as my other self. But today I see no response to my call. I walk alone.

PATEL (*With feeling*): Bapu, do I deserve that?

GANDHI: We no longer see the same vision. (*Almost to himself.*) Night after night I have been going over the past. My acts of atonement are beads strung on the

same string. In September, 1932, I began a fast unto death.

PATEL : Yes, against the Government's proposal to dismember the Harijans from the Hindu fold.

GANDHI : Again, I fasted for 21 days in May 1933.

PATEL : For the same cause. To rouse the Hindu conscience against untouchability.

GANDHI : Last September, I commenced a fast in Calcutta.

PATEL : You achieved a miracle in communal amity.

GANDHI : I lay no claim to superhuman powers. I want none. Today, Hindus and Sikhs are desecrating mosques and thirsting for the blood of Muslims. Soon it may be Sikhs against Hindus, Oriyas against Bengalees, Maharashtrians against Gujeratis, Andhras against Tamilians. The crimes of nations have their retributive sequel. Have I not said that I would far rather that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived? We have been too near the scene of this tragedy to realise how this sinful canker has sapped the very foundations of the whole nation. For centuries we have treated the Harijans as lepers, we have denied them all rights, the use of public wells, roads, schools, hospitals and the like. We have denied them equality before God, even entrance to the places we miscall Houses of God. If we realise this age-long injustice to be an offence against God and this fratricidal warfare as the just retribution due to us, shall we not make ceaseless efforts to wipe out the differences of caste and religion? If we begin to believe that even as Hindus we are one and indivisible, we may then believe that Hindus, Muslims,

Sikhs and Parsees are branches of the same parent tree. That is the lesson I have been wanting us to learn. We can learn it only if we pursue it with our whole heart.

When my eyes close for the last time, may I see an India which is no longer drenched in fraternal blood, an India free from the moral degradation of selfish leadership, an India with its prestige restored, holding sovereignty over the heart of Asia.

PATEL : Bapu, you will live to see it.

GANDHI : If the pledge of peace is fulfilled, it will revive with redoubled force, my intense wish and prayer before God to live the full span. (*Smiling.*) Vallabhbhai, I am told that according to the latest learned opinion one hundred and twenty-five years is only the minimum limit. I can even look forward to reaching an age of one hundred and thirty-three years.

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

[*The afternoon of Friday, the 30th January, 1948. Gandhi's room in Birla House in New Delhi, same as in previous scene. Gandhi, dressed in loin cloth and a little piece of linen which covers his chest and shoulders, is spinning thoughtfully. A few seconds later Devadas Gandhi, his youngest son, enters the room.*]

GANDHI (*Looking up and smiling*): What news, Deva?

DEVADAS: None from my side, Bapu. But how is the ship of State?

GANDHI: The little differences will vanish. After all we all love our country. We must hold together at all costs. We shall.

DEVADAS: I devoutly hope so. What do you think of the revised Congress constitution?

GANDHI: I do not like the draft. The emphasis is all on politics. We have achieved freedom by God's grace. It must mean something to our starving millions. To a famishing people, freedom must appear as work and wages. Congress must take up the constructive programme in the villages in earnest.

DEVADAS: The division of the spoils of power is taking too much time.

GANDHI: So it seems. I am afraid of Congressmen setting themselves up as a ruling class. (*Thoughtfully.*) Do you know that story about the Yadavas fighting amongst themselves in the hour of their glory?

DEVADAS : In the years after the battle of Kurukshetra Lord Krishna found that his people, the Yadavas, had lost all sense of discipline and humility. They had become too self-indulgent and arrogant. (*Laughing.*) Perhaps like some of our Congressmen today. Swollen-headed, not with police blows, but from conceit. Lord Krishna felt greatly concerned for his people and retired to the forest in deep meditation. A hunter mistook him for an antelope and shot him with an arrow. As the hunter drew near, he recognised Krishna and was stricken with grief. Krishna smiled, blessed him and departed from the world of men.

GANDHI : Was it so? What a strange story! I must read it in the original. (*Looking at his watch.*) I have some important work. (*Smiling.*) Who knows whether I shall be alive tomorrow!

DEVADAS (*Getting up*) : By the way, Bapu, I have asked Pearey Lal to dine with me tonight. Can you spare him?

GANDHI : Yes, of course. (*Then with a twinkle*) : But do you ever invite me? (*They both laugh.*) Good-bye, Deva. If I had no sense of humour, I should have been dead long ago.

(*Devadas leaves. Gandhi stops spinning. From a stationery case made of cloth, he takes a post-card. He unscrews the tin lid of a small bottle which serves as an ink-pot. He uses an ordinary pen-holder. The completed post-card, he slips into a basket. He next extracts a piece of paper from his case, divides it into two, and when the concise letter is finished, takes out an envelope,*

addresses it, and slips the letter into it which also is put in the basket. He screws up the lid on the ink-pot and carefully lays aside the pen. He feels sleepy. Leaving his glasses and the sheets aside, he leans back on his pillow and in a few seconds, is fast asleep.)

CURTAIN

(When the curtain rises a few minutes later, Gandhi is walking to the door with an American lady visitor, Gandhi preceding.)

VISITOR : A last question, Mr. Gandhi.

(Gandhi turns round.)

What is your definition of success?

GANDHI : Most people judge success and failure by results. It is a question of means to some and ends to others. Ends do not matter if the means are righteous. Behaviour is success.

VISITOR : A wonderful definition. *(Sardar Patel appears at the door.)* Here is Sardar Patel. Please come in, Mr. Patel. I am leaving.

(Vallabhbhai Patel enters with a small basket of fruit in his hands.)

VISITOR : What have you got? Is it a peace offering? *(Looking at the fruit.)* What lovely fruit, though.

I shouldn't mind being a saint if I could enjoy such delicious fare.

GANDHI (*Laughing*): You need not go so far, you know, to change your diet.

PATEL: I would not advise you to adopt Bapu's diet. He started with goat's milk and gradually came to goat's food. He made me try his salad once. It was made of green leaves of all kinds growing about the place. (*They laugh.*)

VISITOR: It is all right Mr. Gandhi, your experimenting with diets. But you should be careful when you experiment with no-diet. Those fasts of yours. They are very risky at your age.

GANDHI: I assure you that there is no room for foolhardiness in my philosophy. God willing I wish to live to be one hundred and twenty-five.

VISITOR: I fear I have overstayed my allotted time. (*Smiling.*) Good-bye.

GANDHI: Good-bye and God bless you.

(*Visitor leaves. Gandhi and Patel slowly walk to the centre of the stage.*)

PATEL: Is anything the matter, Bapu?

GANDHI: I have not been happy for months now. Since we became a free nation, my agony has increased tenfold. Selfishness and corruption are rampant. We seem to be as far away from our ideals as ever. I wish to live only if I can serve the people. I want their love, and if they love me, they must keep faith with me.

PATEL : Do you doubt the people's love? Here, in Delhi, didn't they give you proof of it, only a fortnight ago when you fasted? Your fast has stood the scriptural test that non-violence should evoke love. I admit there is corruption. But has the Government had a chance yet to deal with it?

GANDHI : Not only corruption, there is growing conflict between Congressmen in their greed for power. Congress has forgotten the peasant and the worker. I have no use for politics which forgets the present and throws dust in the eyes of the people by talking of the future grandeur.

PATEL : Corruption will be purged. We have been shackled by the problems created by the Partition. But Congress cannot come out of politics. It will create a vacuum.

GANDHI : The welfare of 700,000 villages is more important than politics. I know that you and Jawahar are battling bravely. You deserve support. My mind is grappling with this problem. (*Looks at his watch.*) I must go for prayers. (*They get up.*)

PATEL : I shall keep you only for a minute. The Inspector-General of Police has seen me again today. He is much worried about your safety. The bomb throwing last week is not an isolated affair. There is a plot against your life. I have deputed police in plain clothes to attend the prayer meetings. That is not enough. They must be permitted to search those who come to the meeting. There is mortal danger in the air.

GANDHI : I cannot agree to it. I would rather walk in the shadow of death than suspect human nature.

Human nature will respond to friendliness. Why should there be any police on duty at all? The bomb was thrown by a misguided youth. He may have done what he did out of patriotism. A patriot is no less a patriot, because he is misguided. He can be won over. The poor youth should not be harassed.

PATEL : You are making it very difficult, Bapu.

(Gandhi's grand-daughter comes in with a woollen shawl which Gandhi puts on.)

GANDHI : Wait for me, Ava. I am just coming. *(She goes out. Gandhi turns to Patel.)* I have been collecting descriptions of Swaraj. One of these would be "Swaraj is the abandonment of the fear of death." Absence of fear is the supreme virtue. God alone is my Protector. I am not asking for martyrdom, but if it comes my way in the course of my duty, I shall have earned it. *(Moving to the door.)* I am late for the meeting. *(Looking at his watch again and smiling.)* The watch is the only tyrant to whom I will submit—I must go now. *(Leaves supported by Patel.)*

CURTAIN

(When the curtain rises again in the same room, half an hour later, Gandhi is lying as if asleep on his bed in the lap of his grand-daughter. A doctor is examining him with a stethoscope. Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel and others are anxiously watching. The doctor slowly straightens himself and in answer to the mute query of

those present, shakes his head. Nehru with tears in his eyes, and Patel move away and sit down. Others sob quietly. There is the sound of the chanting of hymns in an adjacent room, above which the voice of the large crowd outside can be occasionally heard.

Devadas Gandhi comes in. Patel goes to him and puts his hand round him comfortingly. Devadas walks as in a dream to Gandhi's bed, kneels down beside it and presses Gandhi's arm gently with both hands. He looks round till his eyes rest on the doctor.)

DEVADAS : His body is still warm. *(The doctor shakes his head slowly, but significantly. Devadas then feels Gandhi's pulse and realises that Gandhi is no more. Sobbing, he places his lips close to Gandhi's ear and seems to be whispering something. Patel goes to him and raises him to his feet and they walk slowly down-stage.)*

PATEL : Perhaps God wants Bapu's mission to be fulfilled even through his martyrdom.

DEVADAS *(In despair)* : I am too late. So often he has forgiven my little lapses in the past. I hoped he would relent this last time and give me just one look, unpunctual as I am. But he will not be disturbed now. Oh, God! *(Turning to Patel.)* How did it happen?

PATEL : Bapu left his room just after five. I was with him just before he went to the prayer meeting. As he was a little late, he proceeded without the usual

one minute's relaxation. He was, I understand, ascending the garden steps when a young man came forward from the crowd. He seemed about to prostrate himself before Bapu. But instead he suddenly stood up, whipped out a revolver, and fired thrice. The bullets hit Bapu on the chest. He dropped down whispering "Ram, Ram". In a short while the last breath escaped his lips. Then darkness fell. (*He holds Devadas, comforting him. The voices from the crowd outside are now louder. Devadas looks at Patel enquiringly.*)

PATEL : The people are impatient to pay their last homage to the Father of the Nation. He will have to be removed to the terrace. But before that is done, we must prepare the body for the last rites.

(*They slowly move to the bed and bring it centre-stage. Gandhi is in the same clothes in which he went out in the previous scene. His scanty dress seems tidy to perfection. Devadas removes the outer shawl on which are bits of grass and dust and folds it gently, when an empty shell drops out. Patel picks it up with trembling hands and looks at it, his face the picture of anguish.*)

PATEL : A shell from one of the bullets. The shots were fired at point-blank range. (*Hands over the shell to Devadas.*)

(*Low chanting of hymns from the background can be heard. Devadas removes the little piece of linen with which Gandhi had covered his chest and shoulders. There are huge patches of blood on it. Gandhi is now on view, with only his loin cloth, as the "Naked Fakir".*)

DEVADAS (*Looking at Gandhi's body*): Oh, that gentle forgiving smile on the lips, that thoughtful brow, those hands with the fingers in just that pose, those feet, they are all just the same. I can't believe that three ghastly bullets must triumph. He wished to live to be one hundred and twenty-five.

PATEL: Now he belongs to history. Now, truly he is immortal.

THE CURTAIN FALLS

NOTES

ACT I

The scenes are partly imaginary and partly historical.

SCENE 2 :—Ruskin's book mentioned in this scene is his "*Unto This Last*." This was the first book of Ruskin which Gandhiji has read, and it was lent to him by Mr. H. S. L. Polak, actually at a much later date. Gandhiji, in his Autobiography, relates the incident under the heading "*The Magic Spell of a Book*" and he says "*I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book.*" Gandhiji and Polak influenced each other's life a great deal during their close and eventful association in South Africa.

Gandhiji explains in his Autobiography how he himself suggested that he should go to England to qualify in the medical profession, but was advised by an old friend of the family to become a Barrister, since thereby he could hope to become the Dewan of Porbandar, in due course, like his father before him.

SCENE 3 :—Sheth Ahmad Muhammad Kachhalia is introduced in this scene, although Gandhiji might not have actually met him till a later date.

Similarly, the presentation of the ornaments to Gandhiji took place at a subsequent date.

ACT II

SCENE 1 :—Many events have been telescoped in this scene.

The attack on Gandhiji by Mir Alam is described in Gandhiji's "*Satyagraha in South Africa*." It actually took place some days later than as described, while Gandhiji was proceeding from his office to the Asiatic Office with friends to take out certificates of registration.

SCENE 2 :—The bonfire of the certificates took place at a meeting held on the grounds of Hamidia Mosque at Johannesburg on the 16th August, 1908.

SCENE 3 :—There is considerable telescoping of events in the scene.

ACT III

SCENE 1:—This is largely an imaginary scene.

SCENE 2:—This is entirely historical. The written statement has been somewhat abridged. The full statement can be read in Sri Pattabhi Sitaramayya's "*History of the Indian National Congress.*"

ACT IV

SCENE 1:—This is an imaginary scene, based on an appreciation of the personalities concerned, their utterances and the march of events.

SCENE 2: This is partly imaginary and partly historical. Gandhiji's final speech particularly, is a composite one, embracing his statements just before and during the march to Dandi.

ACT V

The scenes are historical as to the dates and are drawn against the general background of contemporary events.

